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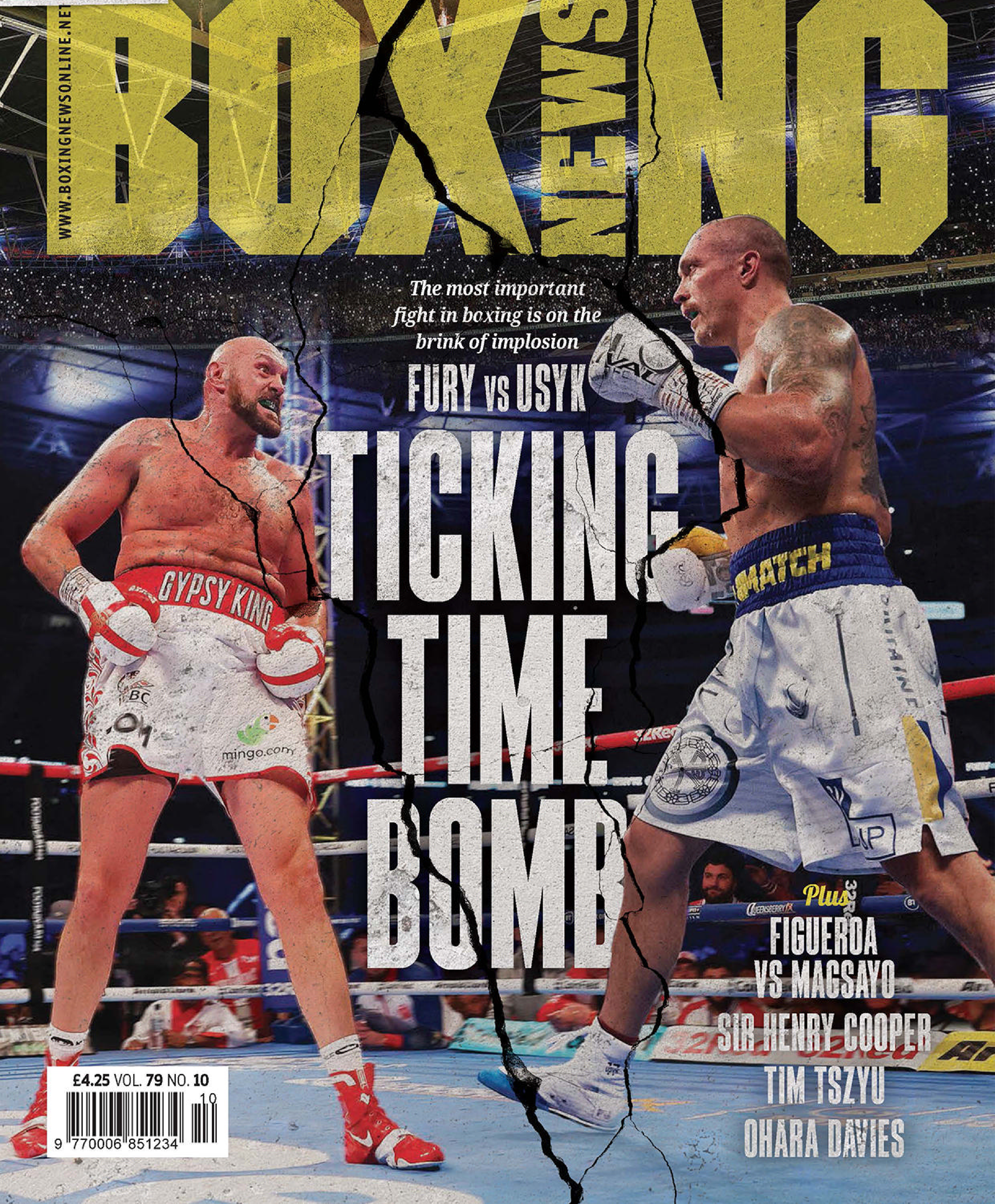

The most important fight in boxing is on the brink of implosion

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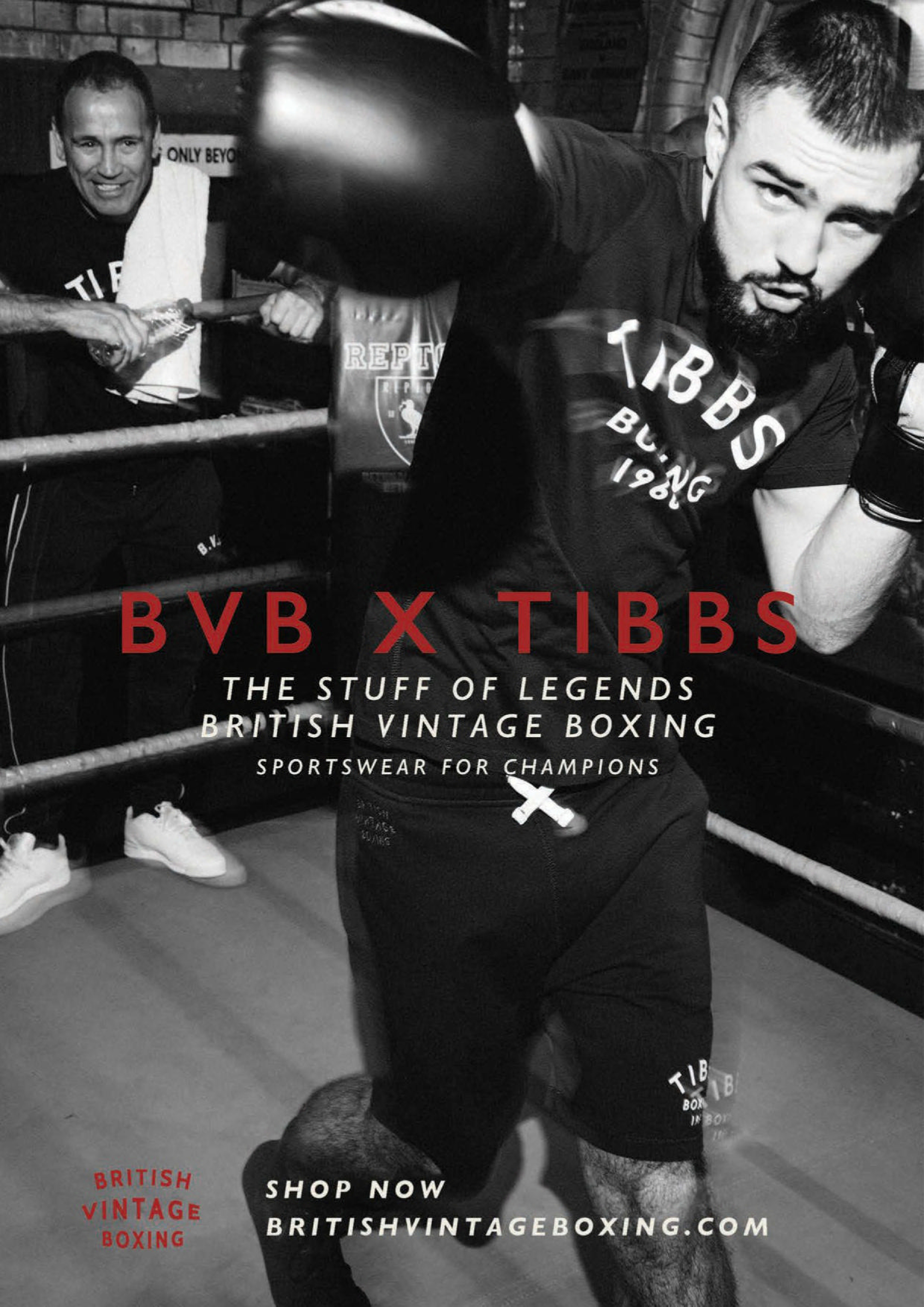
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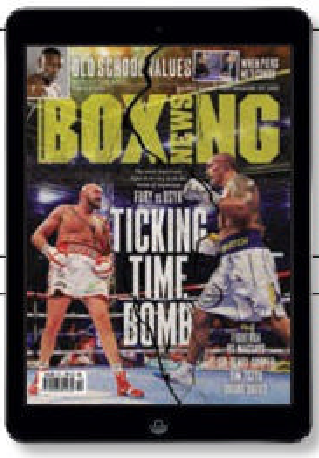
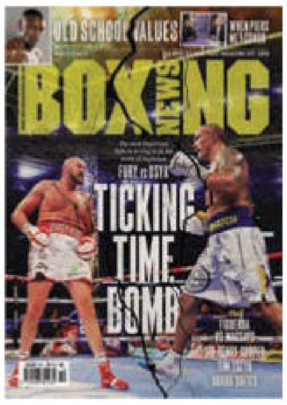


Imminent collapse

Despite the best efforts of the paymasters behind the scenes, the likelihood of Fury-Usyk happening is diminishing rapidly



Cover photography
GETTY IMAGES

Matt Christie
@MattCBoxingNews
Editor

THREE months after beating Oscar Bonavena in December 1970, Muhammad Ali stepped into the ring with Joe Frazier in the biggest fight in the sport's history. Ninety-one days in which contracts were signed, purses were agreed, and ample publicity was generated. Both were to pick up at least $2.5m, then-record fees for athletes of any kind.

It was simpler back then. Boxers by and large fought their closest rivals to ascertain who was the best instead of squabbling for too long about who was the biggest draw. And because the best rivalries were being settled, the sport was appealing to the public; it was reported at the time that more people saw Frazier beat Ali than had watched Apollo 11 land on the moon two years before.

As we go to press, Tyson Fury versus Oleksandr Usyk is in real danger of collapse as they struggle to agree terms. How people conduct their own business is their own business but, goodness me, it's maddening that the best heavyweights of their generation could soon pass their peaks without fighting their closest rival.

After being told last year that Fury-Usyk was all but a certainty for 2023, it is understood that a deal was close for Saudi Arabia, where Skill Challenge Entertainment pull the strings, but an appropriate site, at least before the summer, could not be finalised. Problem is, once fighters and their respective teams get wind of the money on offer in the Middle East, any other territory is going to struggle to even get the attention of the parties in question. In Britain, for example, only crippling losses would follow if promoters attempted to keep pace with the bank of the Saudis. But what other, more established, territories can offer is a climate that doesn't essentially prohibit outdoor events during the hottest months, and stadiums and infrastructure already in place to stage the biggest events.

That left Wembley Stadium on April 29 as the frontrunner. However, with less money on the table than the Middle East, both Team Fury and Team Usyk demanded higher percentages to increase their bottom lines. As things stand, one or both parties need to budge on those estimations of their worth for the contest to take place.

Who merits the greater purse is frankly unknown until they fight, however. Fury is the bigger attraction in the UK whereas Usyk owns three of the four belts. And those sanctioning bodies are an impatient bunch in matters like this, with the WBA and IBF in particular keen to enforce opportunities for their

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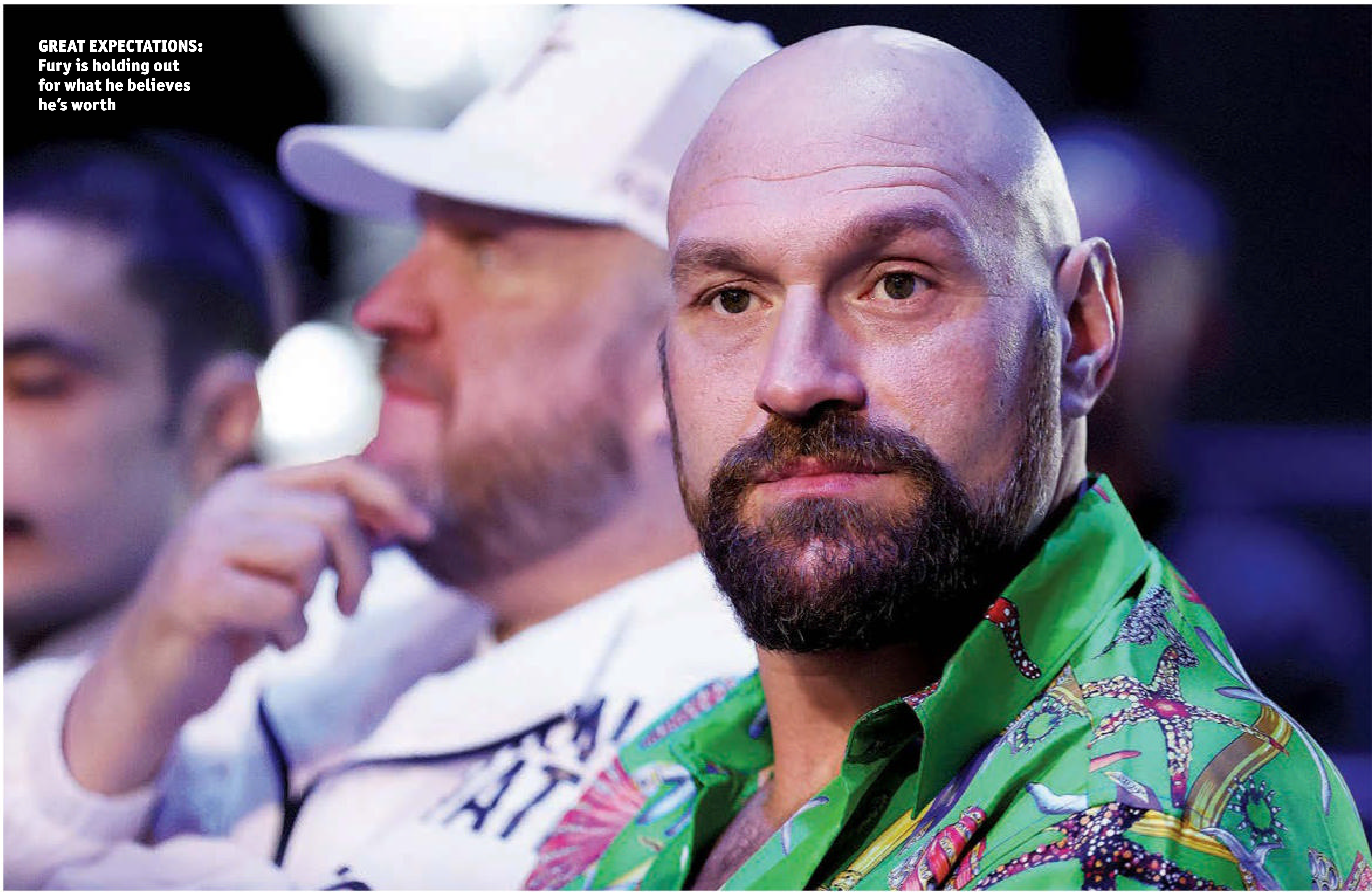


GREAT EXPECTATIONS: Fury is holding out for what he believes he's worth

mandatory contenders, Daniel Dubois and Filip Hrgovic respectively. Deontay Wilder and Joe Joyce hold corresponding positions with the WBC and WBO and both are expected to push their names forward if and when the most important fight in boxing implodes.

Boxing News fears we could soon hear what we've heard before: That mandatories will be dealt with and, don't worry, the 'undisputed' fight will occur later in the year. But anyone who has been following the sport this century should know that such a promise is akin to a parent saying 'I'll think about it' to appease a crying child. We don't doubt that such a scenario is what they'd like to do but recent history dictates that the longer a fight is left on the shelf, the harder it becomes to retrieve. Upsets occur, titles get fractured, politics get in the way.

What is certain, however, is that a concerted effort has, and is, being made behind the scenes to make this contest. The paymasters, despite the sleepless nights they're enduring, want this fight to happen as much as the rest of us. With so many moving parts clogging up the progress, though, it's little wonder our collective dreams are dashed so frequently.

Back in 1971, there were two belts, though they were secondary to the bigger issue of deciding the best heavyweight on the planet. And there were no regional complications nor interference from filthy rich nations; with Ali and Frazier both being American, New York was the only logical choice to stage such a bout. So perhaps it's too easy to look to the past and bemoan the present but, no question, those simpler times certainly made for greater ease when it came to making defining fights. How the current convoluted system plays out in the future is unknown, but it has to be a concerning theme.

It is 23 years since Lennox Lewis and Evander Holyfield collided in 1999 to ascertain the world's best heavyweight. A controversial draw was quickly followed by a return, won by Lewis on points. Since that rematch, we've not had a fight as meaningful in the division. There are a few arguable exceptions that ultimately only underline the point.

After Lewis confirmed his retirement in 2004, Corrie Sanders and Vitali Klitschko met in a bout that some, including Boxing News, felt would decide the new number one at heavyweight. However, Sanders and Klitschko were not universally recognised as the top two like Fury and Usyk are today. Boxers like Chris Byrd, John Ruiz and Lamon Brewster were also there or thereabouts.

Fast forward to 2011. Both Klitschko brothers were atop the division and not willing to fight each other for obvious reasons. So, when Wladimir took on David Haye – the only non-Klitschko to hold a belt – it was (and remains) the closest thing we've had to Lewis-Holyfield in the 21st century.

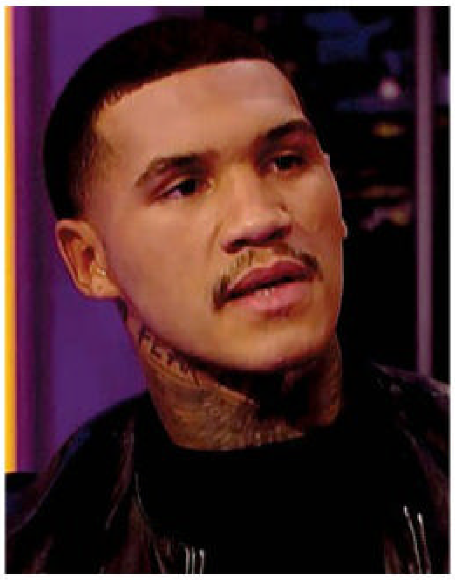
Two other bouts are worth mentioning. With Vitali inactive and leaning towards retirement in 2013, Wlad – widely regarded as the division leader – took on Alexander Povetkin in a bout that possibly contained the best two heavyweights on the planet at the time. Again, however, the clamour for Klitschko-Povetkin was nothing like the desire to see Fury-Usyk in 2023. The last instance of a potential one-versus-two occurred in February 2020 when Tyson Fury thrashed Deontay Wilder in their rematch. But with Anthony Joshua revenging Andy Ruiz Jnr just two months before, Fury-Wilder II was far from finished business.

Let's not get too downbeat. The current crop of heavyweights has generated several contests in recent years that will leave their mark in the history books. Wladimir returning to test Joshua was a triumphant occasion, each of the three Fury-Wilder contests will stand the test of time and Usyk twice outpointing Joshua were masterful displays. Throw in the thrilling exploits of Dillian Whyte, Joseph Parker and Joe Joyce and we can rightly say we're living through a good era.

What can't be denied, however, is that there have been several failures to make the one fight that would make the entire world stop and pay attention. The kind of fight that puts boxing on the sporting map for the right reasons. A World Cup, after all, can only be deemed a success if there's a final at the end of it, regardless of how good the action may have been in the preliminary rounds.

The Klitschko reigns of course made such a final impossible for reasons already explained. But since 2015, Anthony Joshua versus Deontay Wilder did not happen. Fury versus Joshua did not happen. Fury versus Usyk didn't happen last year and now it's natural to fear it's not going to happen at all. Or at least not in the foreseeable future.

In March 1971, Frazier was 27, two years Ali's junior. Here in 2023, Fury will be 35 in August whereas Usyk turned 36 in January. The clock isn't only ticking on these two, time is on the brink of running out.



MORGAN SPELLS IT OUT

Benn's date with Piers leaves Conor considering his options

CONOR BENN'S interview with Piers Morgan on Monday evening (March 6) did nothing to cleanse his image to the boxing public.

Whatever your opinion on Morgan, it was relief to at least hear him ask the most obvious question: Why, if Benn has all of this evidence he is certain will clear his name, is he not taking his case to the one governing body who can do that – the British Boxing Board of Control (BBBofC).

Pride, Benn said.

If the insinuation is that by going to the BBBofC, and in turn United Kingdom Anti-Doping (UKAD), he will be surrendering to their rule then he should instead look at the bigger picture. Seemingly keen to stick his middle finger up to Robert Smith and co, the best way to do that would be to prove his innocence and then never fight in the UK again. *Told you so, now I'm taking my (substantial) business elsewhere.*

Worst case scenario for Benn would be he is found guilty of taking performance enhancing drugs. If that is the ruling, he can appeal. If that appeal fails, he can then take his case to the Court of Arbitration for Sport where the truth nearly always comes out. Any fears of unfair trials would therefore disappear. Time consuming it might be but if he's adamant he's innocent, and genuinely believes he's innocent, going down that route is the only way to clear his name.

ELSEWHERE in the sport, quality matchups are being signed. Down at lightweight, GERVONTA DAVIS and RYAN GARCIA are scheduled to meet on April 22 with world champion DEVIN HANEY set to defend against VASILIY LOMACHENKO in May. Arguably even better than either of those, leading super-bantamweight STEPHEN FULTON JNR will travel to Japan on May 7 to defend two belts against NAOYA INOUE. Thank goodness for the little guys.

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LETTER OF THE WEEK

FULTON-INOUE AN ABSOLUTE TREAT

WHO cares if Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Usyk don't do the right thing and fight each other? Not me, particularly now I have Naoya Inoue versus Stephen Fulton Jnr to look forward to. Two fighters doing things in exactly the right way, showing no fear nor ego, and actively seeking out the toughest challenge available. Bravo!
Darren Scott

IMPOSSIBLE TO PROVE

THE stink created by the Conor Benn saga will, I fear, be around for some time to come. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry after reading last week's excellent editorial. The image of a boxer having to film himself taking an illegal substance for any subsequent action to be brought against them did raise a smile.

The serious point of course is a huge concern for the entire future of our sport. The testing for banned substances is vital but how to act on the results remains a problem and who should be responsible for doing so? Crucially, if it has to be proven beyond doubt that a boxer has taken an illegal substance freely and deliberately before any action can be taken, this surely gives any boxer almost free license to take practically anything. The possible results of this in the ring could be fatal.
Tim Farmer

WHO WAS BENN SPARRING?

I LOVE the podcast. My son and I listen every week while we're on our way to the boxing gym. We have listened to the coverage of the Conor Benn saga and have a question. Who was he sparring, round after round, at the same time that he was failing drug tests?
Tom Connolly

SOME SYMPATHY FOR CONOR

WHILE watching Conor Benn get interviewed by Piers Morgan I felt sympathy for him. If he knowingly took performance enhancing drugs, the weight of screwing up will be a heavy load for his conscience to carry. And if he didn't, well, the frustration at not being able to get his point across must also be excruciating.

It was hard, however, to disagree with Morgan when he urged Benn to go down the right channels to prove his innocence. Irrespective of what happened, I hope Conor can one day soon move on from this; the longer it lingers, the more we should fear for his mental health.
Alice Dyer

NOTHING S**TTY ABOUT AIRDRIE

I READ with interest the story on Martin Bakole and Billy Nelson by Elliot Worsell (*BN*, February 23). I was not impressed with the comment about Airdrie in Scotland being "a wee shitty village". Airdrie is actually a very nice town, outside Glasgow.
Arthur McKenna

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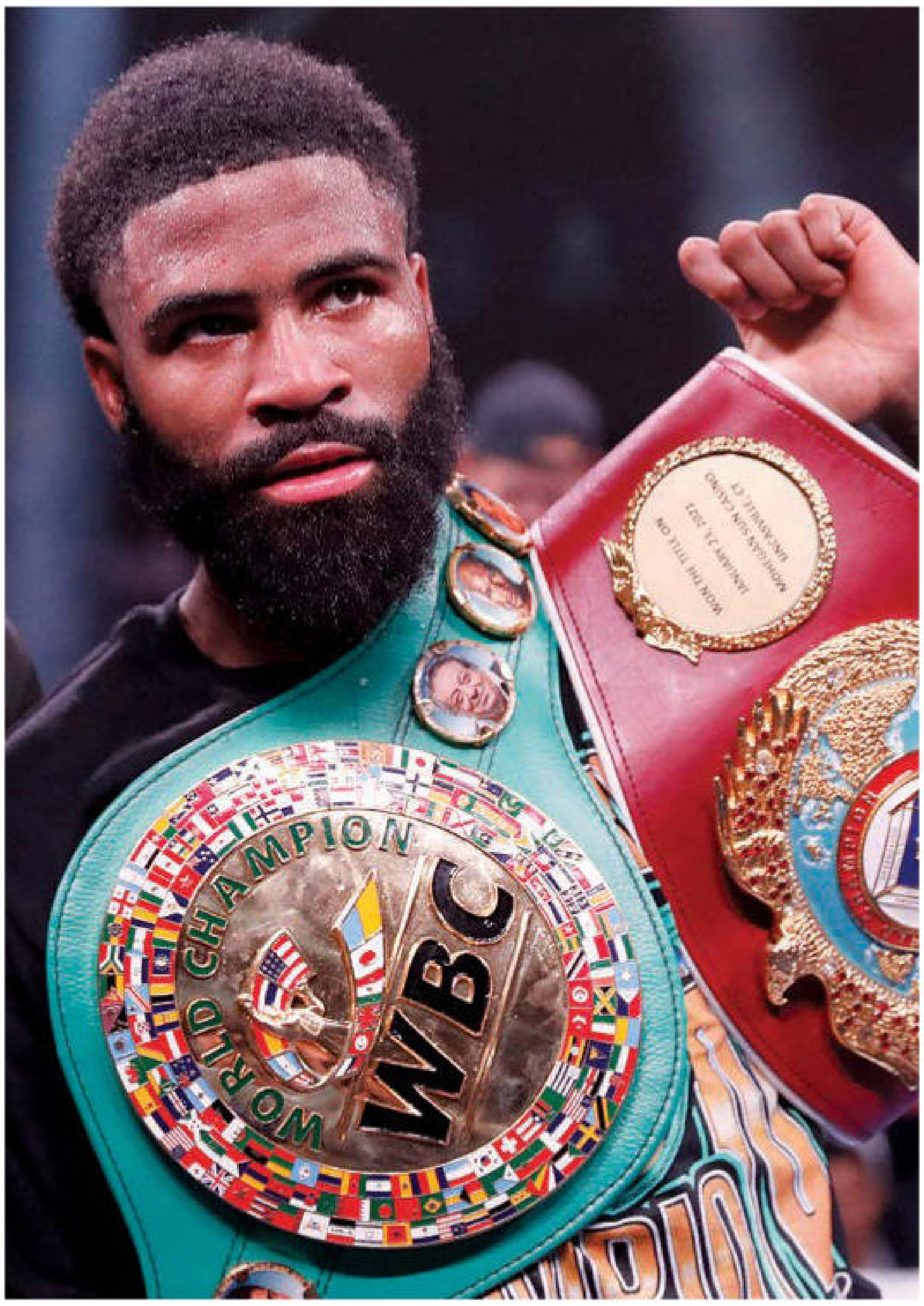


NO FEAR: Fulton will go to Japan to take on the fearsome Inoue

THE PANEL

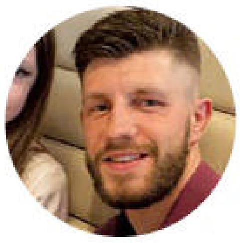
LOTS OF SONS BECAME BOXERS LIKE THEIR FATHERS - WHO IS YOUR FAVOURITE?

Jake Limond
(Lightweight prospect)

I need to back myself on this one! All jokes aside, I really like watching Conor Benn. I know there has been some controversy surrounding him lately but I still think he's a great fighter to watch. Another father-son duo I like is Ricky Hatton and Campbell Hatton. In fact, I'd love to fight Campbell at the end of this year or at the start of next year.

Denzel Bentley
(British champion)

My favourite, without a doubt, is Floyd Mayweather Jnr. For me, he's the best to ever lace up the gloves and is the one I started to watch when I first got into boxing.



Jason Cunningham
(Former European champ)

Floyd Mayweather Snr didn't reach the pinnacle of the sport but still fought the likes of Ray Leonard and ended up becoming a well-respected, successful trainer. The Floyd Snr and Floyd Jnr combination was a unique one. Floyd Snr was a character and gathered a lot of attention, while Floyd Jnr was one of the best to ever lace the gloves up.

Declan Warrington
(Sports Journalist)

Chris Eubank Jnr. He's got plenty wrong – including, occasionally, his conduct outside of the ring – but he's been as good for the boxing media as he has been for his sport, because there's never been a dull moment, and he's consistently showed the type of heart and desire that demonstrates he inherited significantly more than just a marketable name.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE FIGHT BETWEEN GERVONTA DAVIS AND RYAN GARCIA PLAYING OUT?

Jake Limond

Me and my pal were winding Gervonta Davis up on Snapchat not long ago and he gave us some funny replies which made me like him even more than I already did. I think he's a class fighter to watch and a very violent chap. I hope he can get the win.

Denzel Bentley

The fight between Gervonta Davis and Ryan Garcia is going to be a good one, but I've got "Tank" winning it. I think he's an incredible fighter. So is Garcia to be fair, but I just think Davis has the power to take anyone out and I think that will prove the difference.

Jason Cunningham

It's a real 50/50 super fight. I've always liked Davis, who's moving through the weights, and therefore I'm backing him to win. But it's a hard choice.

Declan Warrington

Assuming he can be fully focused given the potential for the bigger issue of his legal troubles to distract him, Davis can stop Garcia. He's shown hints of the type of ringcraft and intelligence that, complementing his power, can punish Garcia's aggressive instincts.

10 COUNT

KOSTYA LIVING

As his son, Tim, prepares to emerge on the world stage, we take a look at Kostya Tszyu's 10 best professional wins

1 ZAB JUDAH
This November 2001 win was the one that truly catapulted Tszyu up the pound-for-pound rankings, thanks to a combination of the fight's magnitude and the manner of the finish that truly scrambled Judah's senses.

2 MIGUEL ÁNGEL GONZÁLEZ
Back in the swing of things after losing against Vince Phillips, Tszyu returned to world title contention when defeating Gonzalez via 10th-round stoppage in August 1999.

3 SHARMBA MITCHELL I
Not content with just the IBF belt, Tszyu picked up the WBA version of the light-welterweight crown in February 2001 when forcing Sharmba Mitchell to retire on his stool after seven rounds.

4 JAKE RODRÍGUEZ
The first of Tszyu's alphabelt title fights, this win against Rodríguez took place in January 1995 and ended with Rodríguez being stopped in the sixth round. The win landed Tszyu the IBF light-welterweight title.

5 SHARMBA MITCHELL II
Tszyu's last win as a pro, this third-round demolition of Mitchell in November 2004 led to Tszyu retaining his IBF belt and, despite his advancing age, teased bigger wins down the line, so great was the performance.

6 JULIO CÉSAR CHÁVEZ
While Chávez was at the time a shadow of his former self, the sixth-round beating Tszyu managed to produce in July 2000 saw him retain his WBC light-welterweight crown and put his name up in lights stateside.

7 ROGER MAYWEATHER
Tszyu's June 1995 fight against Roger Mayweather represented the first time he had gone 12 rounds as a pro. He won, of course, but had to settle for a decision.

8 BEN TACKIE
Tszyu's May 2002 win against Tackie was memorable not only because it was the first time Tszyu had defended three major light-welterweight belts, but also because his performance, a 12-round clinic, was as dominant a performance as you are likely to see.

9 JESSE JAMES LEIJA
Fighting in a major fight at home in Australia for the first time since 1996, Tszyu mauled Leija early during their 2003 fight and refused to let up until Leija had withdrawn on his stool after six rounds.

10 JAN BERGMAN
In what would turn out to be his final successful defence of his IBF title during his first run as champion, Tszyu punished Bergman from the outset before stopping him in the sixth round in September 1996.

MORE THAN JUST A BLEEDER

It's about time that Henry Cooper was remembered in the right way

Steve Bunce
@BigDaddyBunce
Voice of boxing

THERE are some lovely myths and tales about the life and times of Sir Henry Cooper.

The split glove saving Muhammad Ali in their first fight, selling his three Lonsdale Belts for peanuts, swimming the British channel in a race with Joe Bugner, holding a life-long grudge against a referee, being an Olympian, getting knocked out cold too many times, weighing 13st with weights down his kecks. Some are true, some should be true, and some are pure fantasy.

Cooper now has his own statue in South London, close to where he lived. It stands 7ft 9ins and certainly weighs more than the 13st 8lbs that Cooper averaged during his 55 fights. Cooper liked 13st 6lbs and often felt sluggish at 13st 9lbs. He fought from 1954 to 1971. He had 12 British heavyweight title fights and two fights outdoors with Ali. One was for the world title; one was for history. He has untouchable statistics.

In the life and fights and times of Henry Cooper, there are so many other forgotten moments. It is the odd nights that make me chuckle. They are hard reminders of the business that Cooper ran for so, so long. Sure, sending a young Ali down that glorious night in 1963 from a perfect left hook, and losing on the last and saddest night of his career to Joe Bugner, are outstanding memories and they will never fade. But, there are a lot of other nights and fights.

Nobody is talking about the night in early 1966 at Wolverhampton's Civic Centre when Cooper needed about 100 seconds to stop American Jefferson Davis. It was fight number 45 and Davis had previously beaten Henry's devoted brother, Jim; Davis had also been in with a lot of good fighters, including Ali as an amateur. There was no need for the count. Just 12 weeks later, Cooper would walk out and fight Ali for the world title at Highbury. No disrespect to my Black Country brothers and sisters, but how does a genuine sporting idol fight at a Civic Centre in the West Midlands when the deal is done for the Ali rematch? I have no idea how many Ron Gray crammed in there on the night, but it was certainly not the 20,000 that will show up for Joshua's fight against Jermaine Franklin.

Cooper started 1966 with Davis in February, lost to Ali on cuts in May and then in September was back in the ring at a sold-out Wembley Empire Pool against Floyd Patterson. The Patterson fight is as overlooked as the excursion to Wolverhampton.

At the time of the fight, Patterson was far from finished. He had lost to Ali in a world title in his previous fight and the following year would draw with Jerry Quarry. This was a wildly competitive fight and had, I guess, a predictable ending.

"You will have to tell me what happened," said Cooper in the dressing room after losing to Patterson. "What a choker. Any man that does that to me must be good."

It was not pleasant. Patterson dropped Cooper at the end of the third and again in the fourth. The British fighting-folk hero regained his feet, but not his senses. He was helpless when he was hit with a final right hand. The punch was clean, Cooper turned round, clearly out on his feet, and went down, face-first. All over and a few minutes later, still clearly stunned, Cooper had to be told by the press what happened.

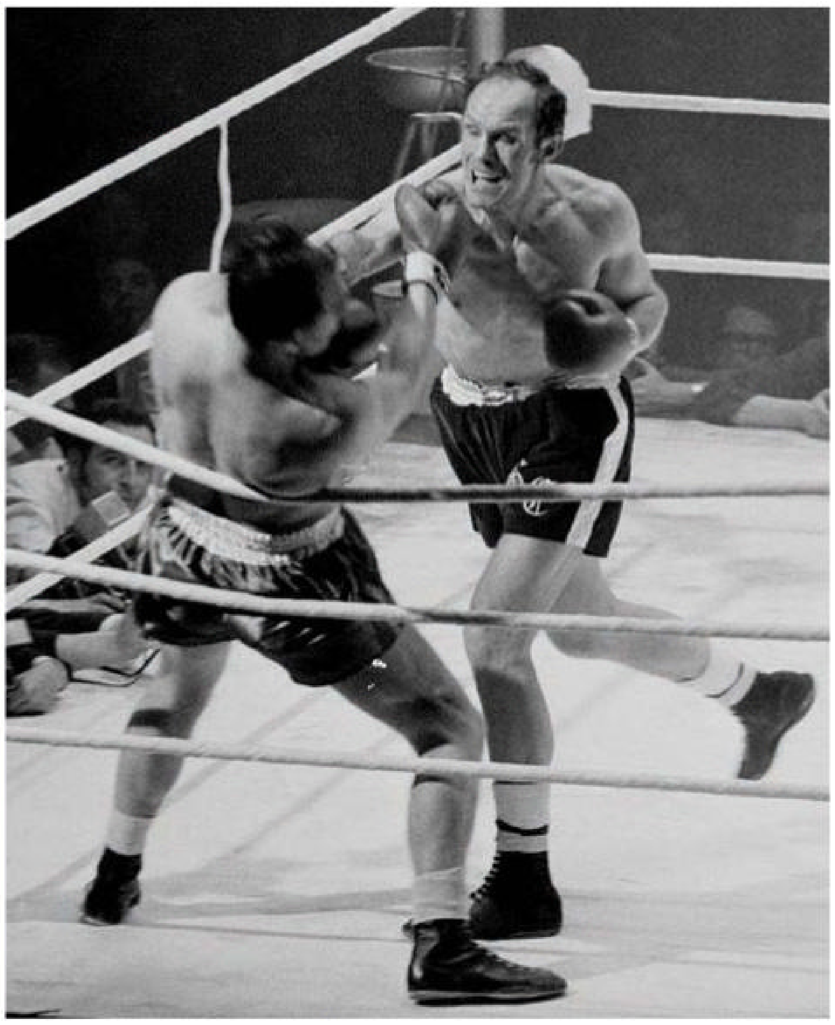
I have always loved the tales from the dressing rooms of fights in the '60s and '70s. The hack pack cram in, pads out, snouts out, and ask a broken and bloody champion what went wrong? No cameras, just words for tomorrow's paper. Cooper was ever obliging. There is a lot more to be learned from Cooper than how to throw the perfect left hook. Honest and vulnerable never fails with the public.

How about the time between September 1956 and September 1957 when Cooper lost four on the spin and was stopped or brutally knocked out in three of them? In 2023, you lose a round and you're condemned. Cooper went to Sweden to lose to Ingemar Johansson for the European title amid that sequence. He lost because the sun was in his eyes, honest, and he never saw the final punch. It's a stunning set of figures. Cooper's career is packed with stunning sets of barely believable figures.

A year later, Cooper outpointed the avoided American, Zora Folley, at the Empire Pool. It was 1958 and at that point, Cooper could have been given a world title shot – he would have to wait over eight years. What a cruel business. In the Folley fight, Cooper was dropped in the third and badly cut from the eighth. It is a hidden epic. Folley had only lost twice before and a few months earlier had drawn with Eddie Machen, who was unbeaten in 24 fights. Folley and Machen were, at that time, the invisible men of boxing. Cooper mixed in the highest of company.

In late 1961, in a fight that makes no sense, Folley got revenge in the rematch with Cooper. The setting was once again the Empire Pool and down and out went Cooper in round two. Cooper, by the way, he weighed just 13st 2lbs. Carl Froch was probably more for most of his super-middleweight fights. The loss ruined all plans for Cooper to fight Patterson for the world title. Folley, incidentally, never got that chance and would have to wait until 1967, when he lost to Ali for the title.

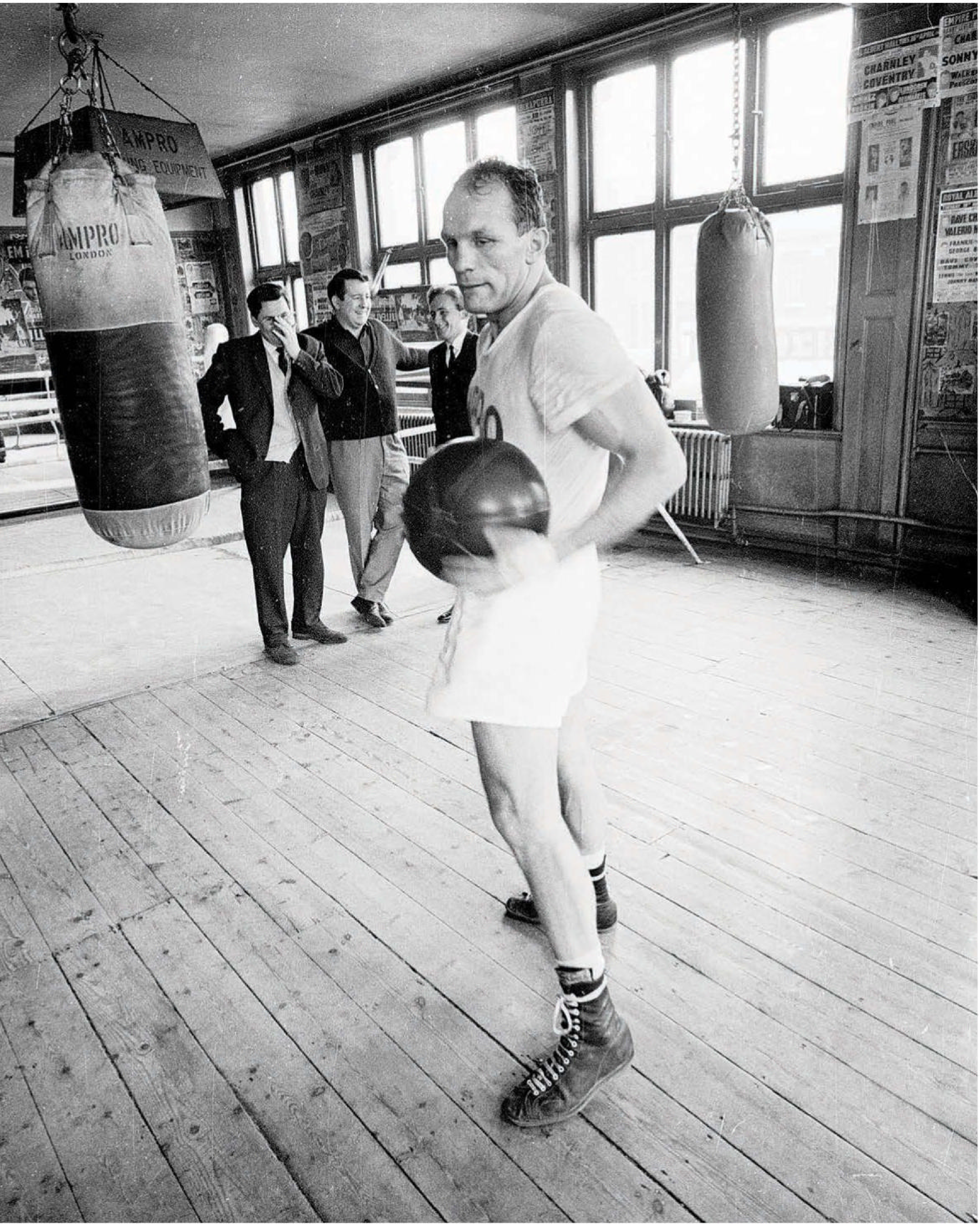
There is a lot more to Sir Henry Cooper than a couple of bloody scraps with Ali. The statue might just be the start of a little overdue attention and affection.



HAMMER TIME: *Cooper attacks Jack Bodell, one of a long list of big names he fought in a 17-year career*

SIZE MATTERS: Cooper fought the best heavyweights, and was one himself, despite weighing less than a modern cruiser

Photos: GETTY IMAGES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'MAKES NO SENSE'

Piers Morgan struggles to understand why Conor Benn won't share the evidence of his case with the right authorities. Whatever happens, the truth will not come out on shows like this, writes **George Gigney**

BROADCASTS

THERE is an occurrence within a societal narrative that signifies the situation has reached a point of incoherence that can't be fixed. It's hit the point of no return. There is no logical way to discern what is the truth and what isn't. And the occurrence that marks that point of no return is quite simple: it's when Piers Morgan starts to make sense.

When you're listening to Morgan speak and find yourself thinking, "he's got a point, there," that's when you know the topic he's talking about has become FUBAR.

That's just what happened on Monday night when Conor Benn sat down with Morgan on his *Piers Uncensored* show. The segment on Benn sat between Morgan discussing whether or not Harry and Meghan will attend the coronation of King Charles and a portion of the show that focused on so-called 'sensitivity readers' making alterations to 'classics' such as *Cinderella* and *Snow White*.

Benn, sitting in the studio with Morgan, was a ball of emotion. He tried his best to keep those feelings – anger, frustration, sadness – at bay, but they spilled over at times. It was a striking change from the defiance he displays on social media and conveyed just how much of a toll this situation has taken on him, regardless of whether or not he is innocent.

He started out on the offensive, labelling his failed drug tests and the subsequent fallout a "witch hunt" - a line his father, Nigel, later echoed when he was brought in to join the interview via video call.

Conor also made some interesting admissions. He said that he "didn't think anything" of the first failed test he was notified of, insisting that he instantly assumed there had been a mistake. That is a rather surprising reaction to have, as Morgan noted, though Benn stuck to that story. He also doubled down on the notion that he did not have any trace of clomifene – the banned substance he twice tested positive for – in his system at any point. He claimed, based on what he referred to as just "science", that he knows for a fact he never had it in his system.

Morgan also asked Benn to reflect on the impact this has all had on his life, in particular the relentless wave of abuse he's receiving on social media. Benn, with tears in his eyes and after some coaxing from Morgan, spoke about the suicidal ideations he had experienced as a result. Whatever you think of Benn and however he is eventually proven – innocent or guilty – no person should

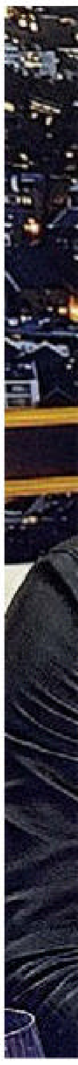
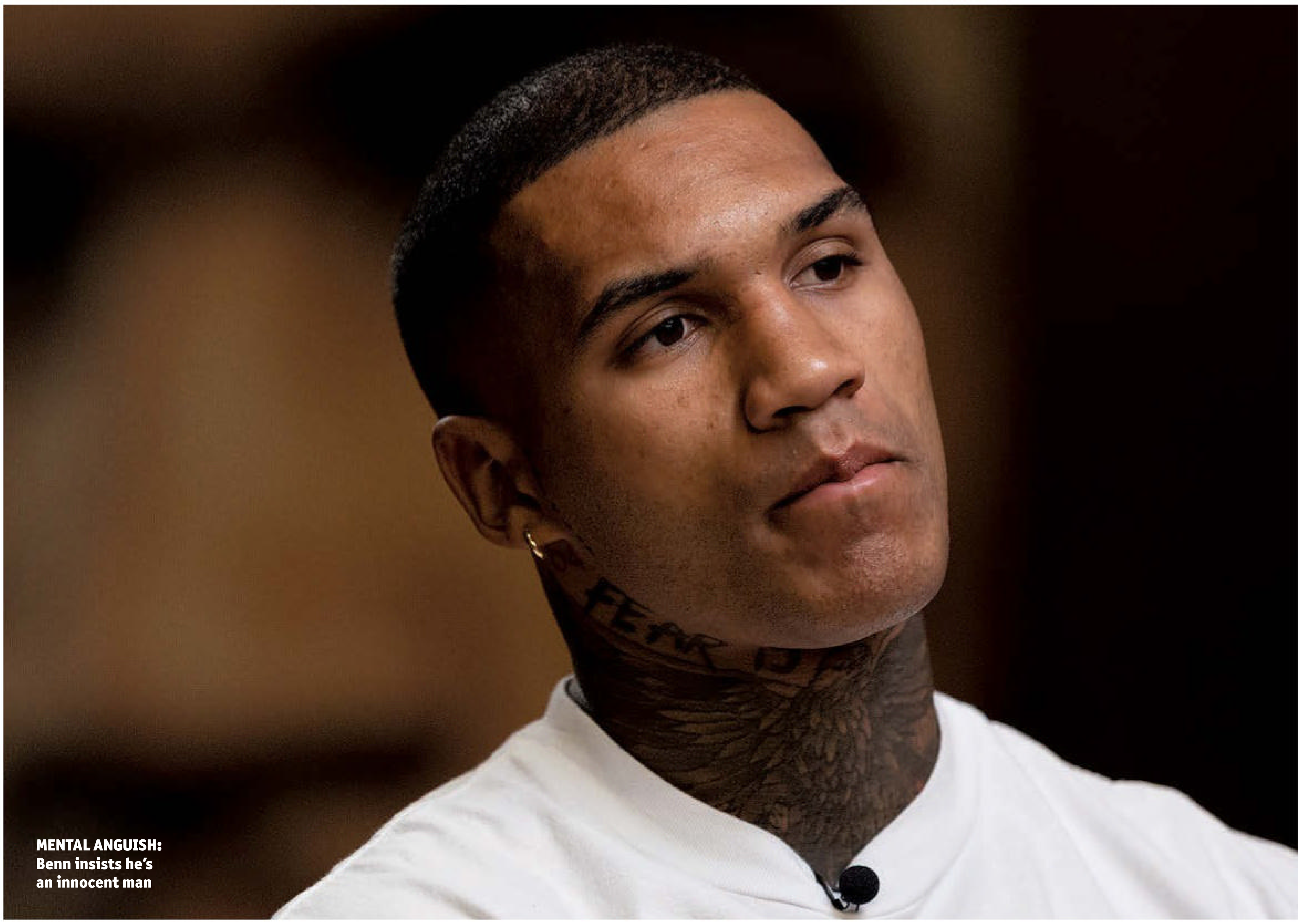


Photo: IAN WALTON/MATCHROOM



MENTAL ANGUISH: Benn insists he's an innocent man

STRANGE CHOICE: Who advised Benn to be interviewed by Piers Morgan?

ever find themselves feeling like that. Thankfully Benn now appears to be in a better place.

Now for the part where Morgan made most sense: throughout the interview he kept returning to the fact that Benn and his team have still not shared the 270-page document they sent to the WBC with the British Boxing Board of Control. He said it "makes no sense" and "cannot be anything but bad for your case" to withhold this evidence that supposedly proves Benn's innocence.

Benn's response was that he does not intend to fight in Britain, and has issues with how the Board has treated him, so sees no need to provide them with the document. Morgan, like most of us, was left confused.

What Morgan also did, which was particularly important, was make it clear that the WBC have not cleared Benn as "innocent," as he and his team have claimed. Morgan said he will reserve his own opinion on the case until all the evidence has come to light, urging Benn to make his 270-page document available to the public. Benn could not provide an answer as to why they haven't done that, apart from the fact that he doesn't believe the document would be enough to convince people of his innocence. Make of that what you will.

It was an odd decision to have Benn join Morgan's show. There are simpler and clearer ways Benn can prove his innocence, provided he has the evidence he claims to have. This TV appearance probably won't harm his case in any major way, but it doesn't seem like it will help it much either.

BENN CLAIMS HE 'DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING' OF THE FIRST FAILED TEST

WEBSITES

Last week, prior to Benn's discussion with Morgan, his promoter Eddie Hearn told Don McRae of the *Guardian* that they intend to apply for a boxing licence in the US, though wouldn't specify where. McRae also spoke to Robert Smith of the Board, who spoke of his hopes that major governing bodies in the US would not present Benn with a licence until he clears his name with credible evidence in front of an anti-doping agency.

The chances of that are slim, particularly given that it looks like a fight between Benn and Manny Pacquiao is in the works. Pacquiao's adviser, Sean Gibbons, has spoken to numerous outlets about the fight, stating how he personally is giving Benn "the benefit of the doubt" when it comes to the failed drug tests. He also confirmed talks are ongoing though insisted there is still a lot of work to be done in order to get the fight made.

The news was quite depressing to read. When it comes to performance enhancing drugs in sport, there is no room for doubt or the benefit thereof. If someone tests positive once, let alone twice, they must have to prove beyond doubt their innocence before stepping foot in a boxing ring. Instead, Benn might get the opportunity to trade blows with a modern icon of the sport, seemingly for a huge sum of money.

BOXING ON THE BOX

MARCH 11

DIEGO PACHECO-JACK CULLEN
DAZN
Coverage begins at 7pm

TONY YOKA-CARLOS TAKAM
Sky Sports Action
Coverage begins at 8pm

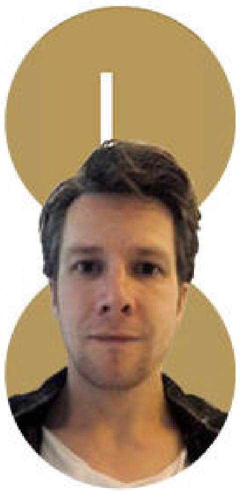
OnlyFun

Tommy Fury, Jake Paul, and how boxing became the OnlyFans of the sporting world

THE TRUTH
PAUL
VS
FURY

FAKE BEEF:
Despite the predictable attempts to make this 'personal', it was clear there was no real animosity between Jake Paul [*left*] and Tommy Fury

Photos: FAYEZ NURELDINE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



Elliot Worsell
@ElliotWorsell
Online Editor

LIKE a boxer who develops a defensive style to compensate for past damage and newfound vulnerability, a hardened boxing fan must carefully pick their battles these days. It's important to do so because you only have so many brain cells and, with boxing, you never quite know when one blow, or one ridiculous fight, will be one too many.

Last weekend, for instance, we had a situation whereby Tommy Fury not only beat Jake Paul but the entire watching audience lost the same number of brain cells as the two participants in the ring. It was for this reason I chose to sit it out and preserve the brain cells I have left. Better yet, in the process I discovered there was no Fear of Missing Out, nor any desire the following morning to catch up with all I had missed. In fact, the only clip I saw from the fight was shown on Monday during the BBC's *News At Six* which followed the presenter asking, "Is this a sign that boxing is changing?"

The change, I wanted to tell her, has already happened, yet to shout at a television screen is an exercise every bit as futile as complaining about influencers in boxing these days and in the end leaves you wondering, "Are they the crazy ones or am I?" All I know is that a lot of people were talking about Fury and Paul "boxing" at the weekend and a lot of people apparently want to see them "box" again.

Beyond that, I know very little about what's going on. On Monday I was emailed an image from the fight to publish alongside our report and in it I saw the word "Bambi" on Fury's trunks and immediately became more intrigued by that than the report itself. Not knowing, at first, whether this was a new nickname, punishment for a lost bet, or the promotion of a new film, I did some research and soon found a clip of Paul handing Fury a gift for his newborn daughter. It was, or so it seemed, the climax of one of those tiresome head-to-heads that are so commonplace in boxing today and, watching the body language of both, it was clear there was no real dislike between them whatsoever. Seemingly uncomfortable with hostility, they appeared, to me at least, like two blokes kept apart by their love for the same woman only to one day meet up and realise they have lots in common.

This made the prospect of them then fighting all the more ludicrous. After all, if you don't even have genuine hostility as the impetus behind a manufactured fight like this, what is the point of it? A forced rivalry in boxing is nothing new, but at least in previous cases – those involving proper boxers – we could be almost certain that two professionals would put on a good show, regardless of any pre-fight script. With Fury and Paul, there was no such guarantee.

For most watching, that hardly mattered, of course. All that really mattered on the night was that fans of these two men were seeing them topless and exposed, with both at risk of humiliating themselves in front of cameras. As famous people fighting, it was frankly irrelevant that neither could fight very well, nor did it matter that the fight, despite the presence of the WBC's version of a dentist's lollipop, meant absolutely nothing in any realm not governed entirely by ego and money. Rather, this was OnlyFans does boxing. It was simply two men with huge followings (built away from boxing) exploiting their disciples' blind loyalty by giving them access to something nobody who follows them would have expected a few years ago (back when Paul was filming pranks on YouTube and Fury was on *Love Island*).

Together, in collaboration, they were able to produce their juiciest bit of content yet, and where better to film it than in a boxing ring? Moreover, who better to target than boxing fans, the Pay Pigs and Reply Guys of the sporting world, the basement dwellers, the creeps, the perverts? Apparently, if the sudden influx of influencers and other circus freaks is anything to go by, we have low standards, no taste and nothing better to do. We jump at the first sign of skin or violence and our thirst for both blood and clout makes us obvious prey.

What likely helps, too, is that boxing is a simple sport. It's easy. Anyone can do it. You whip off your top, put on a pair of trunks and gloves, and away you go, swinging your arms. This makes it an easy sport to enter and an easy sport to sell and nowadays, so shaky is its infrastructure, there is every chance the sport will welcome you with open arms as opposed to protecting its own (fighters, integrity, reputation). Indeed, just as some people believe boxing is being used in the Middle East to sportswash questionable human rights practices, so it could be argued that influencers in boxing are being used to cover up the sport's ailing health.

Still, best not to think about that. Better to bury our heads in the desert sand. From this position, with their heads buried, the ones who speak positively about fights like Fury vs Paul tend to be those with a financial interest in the movement – currently or, they hope, in the future – or those who crave attention or those who see an upside to being onside with the influencers. For them, it's all a bit of fun. Lighten up, they say. What's the problem?

وزارة الرياضة
Ministry of Sport
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وزارة الرياضة
Ministry of Sport

SKIN IN THE GAME: Topless and parading on camera for their followers, Fury and Paul were only tapping into a lucrative existing model

Well, there is no problem if you consider money both the root of happiness and the measure by which you are judged. But when you take all the things that make boxing just about still noble – competition, skill, courage – and then sacrifice them all in the name of so-called entertainment (not boxing entertainment, but social media entertainment), what exactly is the purpose of the sport going forward?

Because, make no mistake, those things are being sacrificed. They will also continue to be sacrificed for as long as this recipe for (financial) success is championed by people within the sport who should know better.

Someone like Jake Paul, a tourist, doesn't know any better. Which is why, among the many chancers involved, I find him the least shameless of the lot. When, for example, he filmed himself boasting about earning $30million from the Fury fight, a scene redolent of an empowered woman posting her OnlyFans receipts to prove to sceptics they are not lying and prove to herself it is all worth it, it was hard to knock Paul, even if such a boast can be all of these things at once: impressive, admirable, uncouth, sad.

We must remember that Jake Paul didn't create this movement. He merely took advantage of a service and audience already in place. We must also keep in mind that just as feminism shouldn't be confused with morally bankrupt capitalism, nor should a successful boxing promotion be confused with a mugging in a desert.

NEW START: Eggington with [*left to right*] Scott Murray, Jon Pegg and Steve Bunce

'We can't all be Mayweather'

Sam Eggington might not be undefeated but he has no plans to retire, writes **Matt Bozeat**

JON PEGG, Birmingham's man about boxing, recently received a nice surprise. Pegg has found it easier to find opponents for his stable of fighters than it has been to find a copy of his short film, *The Wait*.

Made in 2009, *The Wait* is a darkly comic snapshot of a group of journeymen waiting to fight. *Boxing News* included it in our top 50 boxing movies a few Christmases ago.

"I had given up [on finding a copy of the film]," admitted Pegg.

"I thought I was more likely to find a film of Harry Greb. But then Richie Woodhall [who is in *The Wait*] rang me up and said he had found a copy of it in a box at his house.

"I'm looking forward to seeing it again."

Pegg is currently putting the finishing touches to another film and here's an idea for another: A skinny teenager walks into a gym and says, "I'm going to be a dad and I've just lost my job. I need to make some money. I want to be a journeyman." The coach watches him spar and says, "You're too good for that. You can be a champion."

In subsequent scenes, Sam Eggington starts his pro career fighting out of the away corner and goes on to win British, Commonwealth and European welterweight titles before his 25th birthday. He then moves up in weight, has a pair of domestic fights of the year and wins and loses a minor sanctioning body belt.

So, what's next for the 29-year-old from Birmingham?

"Who knows with Sam," said Pegg. "He even surprises me sometimes. After the Ted Cheeseman fight [a close points loss in August 2020, named fight of the year by the British Boxing Board of Control] people were saying he should retire.

"He got offered silly fights, retirement fights, but we said there was more in the tank. Nobody thought that after the Cheeseman fight Sam would go on a four-fight winning streak, have another fight of the year, beat a former 'world' champion [Carlos Molina], and earn better than he had done throughout his career."

Next is an eight-rounder on the opening night of the Excelsior Sporting Club in the Premier Suite at Bar Sport in Cannock, Staffordshire, owned by Scott Murray, on March 30.

That is where Pegg watched Eggington's last fight, the points loss to Dennis Hogan in Australia last October that cost him his IBO belt.

"I have flown before," said Pegg, "but I'm not keen on it. I had an operation and the doctors told me, 'No long-haul flights.'

"I watched it at Scott's and knew after two rounds Sam wasn't going to win. I knew he didn't want to be there. He was homesick. He couldn't talk to his kids and he wasn't the same fighter."

We should see a more familiar version of Eggington now that he's back home and fighting for fun again. The Hogan fight paid off Eggington's mortgage.

He and partner Charlotte have three children – Layton, Laila and baby Kai – and Eggington said: "It's crazy in my house. They are all climbing and jumping around everywhere.

"It's a relief to go to the gym and get punched in the face!

'IT'S A RELIEF TO GO TO THE GYM AND GET PUNCHED!'

"I would love them to do the amateurs, but the pros is a dog's game. You're the main man one day, you slip up and you're a bum and go to the back of the queue. It's fickle.

"I've been told to pack it in a few times after one bad night and that doesn't happen to golfers and tennis players. In UFC, you can lose and still be considered a good fighter. We can't all be Mayweather.

"I don't have to worry about what people think now. I have done it all. I've won every title from the Area to the [IBO] 'world' title.

"Just give me half a chance and I will win some more belts. I still love boxing. I like the fighting, the training. I like it between the ninth and 12th rounds when it's going back and forth.

"I have some skill, but when it goes past six rounds, that's when I really shine. That's what I love, when your eyes are black and your hands hurt and it's time to go to work."

Eggington was spotted smiling as he and Cheeseman crashed punches off each other in the closing rounds of their classic that the Londoner won narrowly on all the scorecards.

"That was a good fight, and we should have had a good wage out of the rematch," said Eggington, "but he went another route and the fight is dead now.

"I'm going to enjoy it now. I was enjoying it before I won the [IBO] title [with a points win over unbeaten Pole Przemyslaw Zysk last October]. The pressure is off again now."

Eggington didn't feel any pressure

Photo: PETER LORIMER/GETTY IMAGES

OVERACHIEVER: Eggington turned pro expecting to be a journeyman, but has won 32 bouts and a haul of belts

when he started his pro career with a four-rounder against Leon Findlay (2-0-1) at a Swansea nightclub in September, 2012.

"There was me, Dee Mitchell, Max Maxwell, Jon and Lenny Woodhall in the car and I knew I was meant to lose," he said.

"I thought it was going to be a laugh. I just wanted to get through it, get paid and do it again the following week. I was doing 60-hour weeks in a sheet metal factory at the time and couldn't believe I was getting that much money to fight."

But three minutes into his pro career and Eggington had had enough.

"I told Jon at the end of the first round: 'Get me out of here, I'm spent,'" said Eggington. "Because I only boxed as a junior, I never fought three-minute rounds in the amateurs. I did it in the gym, but that was with big gloves against lads from the gym who would lay off me when they knew I was tired.

"I got slapped about by Jon and Lenny [at the end of the first round] and decided to carry on. I must have won the next three rounds, because I got the decision."

Eggington says he's had "lots of ups and downs" since then and he finds himself coming off a loss again after his out-of-sorts performance in Australia.

"It wasn't so much the time away from home that was the problem," he said, "it was more that if something happened, it would take me 24 hours to get home.

"It wasn't like being in Italy when I could just jump on a plane.

"My kids were just going to school, and it was the wrong time to be fighting there. My coaches were saying, 'This is the chance of a lifetime,' but I just couldn't shake it off and enjoy it. I just wasn't there. I threw about 400 punches in 12 rounds and I do that in six rounds of sparring."

Eggington was recorded throwing 1,317 punches at Bilel Jikitou in Coventry in September, 2021.

That fight earned Eggington his second Fight of the Year award, but for all his wars, he's only been dropped once in his 32-8 career, by Welshman Dale Evans in the second round of their fight in October 2015.

"If I start hitting the deck regularly, I'm going to pack it in," he said. "But I feel good. I'm pushing it in the gym and the numbers don't lie.

"I'm not even thinking about retiring. Once you start thinking about it, you've got one foot out of the door. We will see what happens. Boxers can be sitting there thinking, 'Nothing's happening', and then the phone goes and they get offered the biggest purse of their career.

"Give me a ring and if the purse and weight are good, I'll be there, and I will give anyone a tough 12 rounds – or less."

LEVELS TO THE GAME: Watkins with the Commonwealth belt he held in 2017-18

Photos: JAMES CHANCE/GETTY IMAGES

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CYCLONE PROMOTIO
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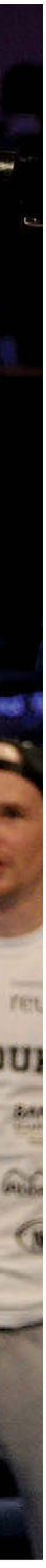


RIVAL
JORDAN
THOMPSON

ON THE RISE: Thompson is unbeaten but untested

Duke of Hazard

English cruiserweight champion Luke 'The Duke' Watkins claims he would beat Tommy Fury and Jake Paul on the same night, but is for now focused on snapping the unbeaten record of Jordan Thompson, writes **Elliot Worsell**

IT was hard during all the hoopla that surrounded Tommy Fury vs Jake Paul not to spare a thought for the domestic cruiserweights who would sacrifice an arm for a fraction of the attention those two novices received in the month of February.

One such cruiserweight is Luke 'The Duke' Watkins, whose pro career has been something of a slow-burner, thanks in no small part to the fact he calls Swindon, hardly a boxing hotbed, his hometown. Nevertheless, Watkins, now the English cruiserweight champion, says he would be more than happy to entertain a fight against either Fury or Paul – or both – if they wish to be taken seriously anytime soon.

"I would beat Tommy's arse and Jake Paul's arse on the same night," Watkins told *Boxing News*. "I can't even think about that type of thing, it would be so easy. I would beat the hell out of them both. It just comes down to experience. They might have a bit of salt but I've got the full fat, the salt and pepper, and the extra seasoning. Over time they will get it, if they stick at it, but right now they don't have what it takes. There are levels to this game and experience is so important."

Despite insisting that neither man would be a match for him, Watkins speaks with no envy when commenting on Fury and Paul. Instead, though it would be easy for a fellow cruiserweight to bemoan their relative lack of opportunity, Watkins is full of admiration for Fury and Paul, not so much for their boxing ability but rather their ability to capitalise on good fortune and privilege.

"It is what it is," he said. "They put bums on seats, and when you put bums on seats, you can make money. Good luck to them both. If you're envious, it's a bit of a victim mentality. I always try to think about what they were both born into. Tommy is the younger brother of the world heavyweight champion, which automatically brings him some form of platform. That has allowed him to become a celebrity of sorts in the UK, and the same goes for Jake Paul, who has also had certain opportunities. It's all just circumstantial. Some people are born poor in Third World countries, whereas we can consider ourselves lucky to have been born in England. You've just got to let them do their thing and concentrate on your own path."

As for Watkins' own path, the next step along it will see him face Jordan Thompson, 14-0 (11), in Cardiff on April 22. It is, he admits, a fight and a showcase he has been craving, one more essential than ever now that he has turned 33 and finds himself again in contention for bigger championships.

"I wouldn't say this is the fight I've been waiting for – because I don't wait for things – but it's the one I've been hoping for," Watkins said. "Now it's here and I have to take advantage of it. Jordan is a Matchroom boy and they're backing him, which is good for me. It gives us that limelight and that platform."

> **'HE'S A MATCHROOM BOY, WHICH IS GOOD AS IT GIVES ME A PLATFORM'**

Unbeaten but untested, Thompson has built his 14-fight record primarily by stopping journeymen. In his most recent fight, however, and his stiffest test to date, he was taken the full 10 rounds by Vasil Ducar, a wildman from the Czech Republic familiar to UK fans.

"I do my due diligence," Watkins said of his next opponent. "You always keep an eye on what is going on in your division, but he [Thompson] wasn't someone I kept close tabs on. However, I will go back and watch more of him and get to know his strengths and weaknesses. He's a competitor. He's 14-0 and he's got the belief of an unbeaten fighter. I've been in his position. I know what it felt like when I was in his shoes. I have to respect that and also go out there and do what I've got to do.

"I see what Matchroom are trying to do. They're backing him and see me as the outsider stepping in to give him a good test. They are asking the question: 'Can Jordan get past Luke?' They know I am a good fighter and they want to know if their man can beat me. The thing is, I've got my own career, my own belief, and my own aspirations. I won't allow their plan to materialise."

Never one to expect anything to be given to him, Watkins, 16-2 (11), is a cruiserweight accustomed to operating in the shadows and doing his best work to little or no fanfare. Last time out, for instance, in July, he snared the English cruiserweight belt with a sixth-round stoppage of Ian Martell, also previously unbeaten, in a fight only those in attendance at the Civic Hall in Grays will have seen.

"It was good," Watkins said. "He started strong, which I expected. You've got to give respect to an unbeaten opponent and take them seriously. He was coming in there undefeated and hungry and wanting to be a champion. There was no doubt he believed in himself. However, I'm more experienced, so once the fight settled, I just started picking him apart with the jab. I got into gear two and then that was it. I broke him down and finished the fight."

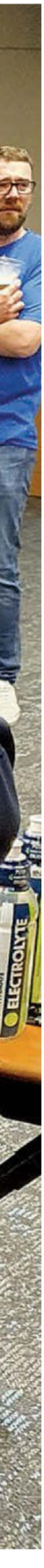
Touching on the lack of attention, Watkins added: "The unfortunate geographical truth is that I live in Swindon. They're not thinking about me. They're thinking about the guys in the big cities. My career slowed down due to that but I've stayed true to the game and to myself. I have always continued training and I have taken fights when they have been presented to me. Now I'm here ready to get back into the mix and get my career rolling again."

To get his career rolling again Watkins will, on April 22, need to snap the unbeaten record of Thompson, just as he did with Martell last year and just as he did with Robin Dupre in 2017.

"I expect to see the best Jordan Thompson there has ever been," he said. "On the flipside, you'll see the best version of me. I expect an entertaining fight and I expect to knock him out."

EMPTY-HANDED: Despite a fine effort, Derbyshire, with manager Carl Greaves, has nothing to take home from Malta but bruises

TEAM
DYNA
CG
CarlGreaves
PROMOTIONS
TEAM



"I NEVER GET A FAIR SHAKE"

Following a contentious loss in Malta to Connor Butler, a despondent Craig Derbyshire is contemplating retirement. He speaks to ***David Wainwright***

COMMISERATIONS on your loss to Connor Butler for the vacant Commonwealth flyweight title on February 26. The general opinion at ringside was that the fight was a lot closer than the scorecards (116-111 twice and 115-112) would suggest.

I honestly thought I had done more than enough, and I was three or four rounds up. But it is what it is when you fight in the away corner – you never get a fair shake.

In the bout before, in April last year, there was controversy when your fight with Tommy Frank for the British title was scored a draw. Some believe the second knockdown you suffered should have been ruled a push.

It was actually a shoulder charge by Tommy as he was panicking with only 15 seconds left in the fight. He couldn't block me and just pushed me to the floor. I don't know, I don't really expect much from boxing anymore.

You must feel disappointed that you're not being interviewed as the British and Commonwealth flyweight champion.

One-hundred percent that's how I feel. You can watch the fight back for yourself and you will understand why I'm so upset. It's really disheartening, to be honest. I feel like giving up boxing completely, but I'm really torn. I feel like I've been had over, but I'm not the sort of person to give up.

Your camp wasn't ideal due to problems with renewing your medicals after a brain scan and a nasty rib injury. Irrespective of your thoughts on the decision, the scan alone must be a concern?

It was at first. I don't want to get to 50 years old and I can't remember my own name. I went to see a specialist and my brain was examined for three to four hours. I passed that, so was able to fight. Apparently there has been a slight change in my brain scan, which I know isn't very good and I was only passed the week before flying out to Malta. But you've just got to keep moving forward.

With regards to the rib injury, I pulled my fifth rib from the cartilage in sparring about four or five weeks before the fight. But there was no way I'd be pulling out the fight. I told my trainer Niall Almond that we'd got zero chance of winning the Commonwealth title if I pull out. At least if I fight, I've got a 40 per cent chance of winning it.

The same weekend you boxed in Malta, we saw Tommy Fury beat Jake Paul with fans watching from all over the world and both fighters earning vast purses for a fight far less meaningful than a Commonwealth title fight. Does it bother you?

It doesn't, really, if I'm honest with you. What bothers me more, for example, is the Tommy Frank fight and last weekend's fight [with Butler]. You don't get what you deserve in boxing, you get what you're given and, in a way, that's what is making me fall out of love the sport. I understand you've got the away corner and the home corner where things might fall in their favour when the rounds are tight. But when you do more than enough to counteract that, and still don't get the right result at the end, it's heartbreaking.

People don't see the hard work that gets put in for these sorts of fights. You train properly three times a day, take time off work [as a fencing contractor] and time away from your wife and kids. By making these sacrifices, I don't expect anything given, but I do feel my efforts are deserving of more. I've put my life on the line in boxing, especially against Connor and Tommy. It's just so disheartening. It's hard to say if I'll box again. It's just the way you get treated.

People might look at your 8-29-4 (2) record and come to the wrong conclusion about you as a fighter.

I walk downstairs and look in my trophy cabinet. There are two Central Area belts [bantamweight and super-flyweight] and two English super-flyweight title belts. People tell me I've done fantastic to have won those with no amateur experience and only boxing in the away corner.

But there should be a Lonsdale Belt and a Commonwealth title belt in there now. It's just disheartening to think that there's two people walking around thinking they are champions when really they are not. If that was me, I honestly don't think I could look at myself in the mirror. That's why I'll never box in the home corner, as I want to be able to say I won that fight and know I won it, because nobody gave me the benefit of the doubt because of which corner I was in.

What improvements could be made by the boxing authorities to improve the quality of judging?

I don't know. Maybe some sort of panel to analyse the judges scoring by watching the fight back or some sort of VAR system where you can quickly correct mistakes on knockdowns. For example, if my 12th-round "knockdown" against Tommy Frank had been ruled out, I'd have won by a majority decision.

What does the future hold for Craig Derbyshire?

I don't honestly know. I've spoken to Niall Almond and Carl Greaves about a rematch with Connor Butler. But how would I feel if the same thing happened to me again with Connor or Tommy Frank? I'd happily fight either of them in my back garden with a referee and no judges. I know who the winner would be.

If I'd not passed my medicals to box in Malta, I told Niall that I was going to aim for the getting my half marathon time down by a couple of minutes so I could run with the elite athletes at the London Marathon, which is an ambition of mine. I even went for a three-mile run the morning after my fight. They all think I'm mad.

Now isn't the time to make any rash decisions. I'll see what [promoter] Dennis Hobson and Fightzone have to say, speak with Niall, Carl, my family and I'll take it from there.

ACTION

★★★★★ OUTSTANDING ★★★★ GOOD ★★★ FAIR ★★ DISAPPOINTING ★ RUBBISH

Reporters' star ratings for main events and undercards are based on in-ring entertainment, competitiveness and whether overall expectation was met

Close but no cigar

Magsayo might have been a fair loser, but he deserved better from the officials, writes **Jack Hirsch**

ONTARIO, CA

MARCH 4

★★★★☆ MAIN EVENT

★★★★☆ UNDERCARD

AS THE fight entered the later rounds, it appeared as if **Brandon Figueroa** would have to rally down the stretch to pull out a 12-round decision over **Mark Magsayo**, but that was not the case. While there is no disputing that the decision in favour of the Weslaco, Texas, fighter was fair, the official scorecards more than flattered him.

Though the outcome seemed to be in doubt right up to the final bell, Judges Zachary Young (118-108), Gary Ritter (117-109), and Fernando Villareal (117-109), had Figueroa winning in a rout. Magsayo and his manager Sean Gibbons vented about the scoring in the dressing room afterward, as they did about referee Thomas Taylor deducting two points and his overall handling of the contest.

For what it's worth, *Boxing News* scored 114-112 for Figueroa.

In many ways, this fight played out as expected in that Magsayo, 27, would got off to a quick start before Figueroa's relentless pressure turned the tide. The Filipino tired badly down the stretch and was strictly in a survival mode by the end.

"I dominated him. It was pressure, pressure, pressure," said Figueroa afterward. "He was feeling the punches to the body. I confused him a lot. He didn't know what to do."

Well, not exactly. It was a case of Magsayo being unable to maintain the pace, nothing more. After taking rounds two and three on all the judges' scorecards, inexplicably he won only one more on two of them. Magsayo landed quality shots on his southpaw opponent throughout, but there was a sense they were thrown more with the intent of keeping Figueroa off him than anything else.

Working behind a good jab, Figueroa, 26, showed a sense of urgency coming out for the sixth round. He stunned Magsayo with a left and landed right hooks. Magsayo tried to steal the round by flurrying at the end, as he did various times throughout the contest. In fairness to referee Taylor, he did warn Magsayo at various points about holding. Magsayo would lock up Figueroa's left arm on the inside; a veteran move but one that is not exactly legal. In the eighth, the first of the two points was deducted. The action was also temporarily halted after the fighters clashed heads. The loss of a point spurred Magsayo on and he rallied with several combinations. Magsayo also got the better of things in the ninth for *BN*, though not on the official cards. His faster hands kept him ahead of Figueroa during the exchanges. But that was his last hurrah. The championship rounds were all Figueroa.

In the middle of the 10th, a left hook to the body badly hurt Magsayo. He went down twice in the round in an apparent attempt to buy time, both called slips. Then in the 11th another point was deducted for holding. Taylor's call was a little harsh, but considering the latitude

FULL RESULTS

Brandon Figueroa (126lbs), 24-1-1 (18), w pts 12 **Mark Magsayo** (126lbs), 24-2 (16); **Armando Resendiz** (161lbs), 14-1 (9), w rsf 10 **Jarrett Hurd** (159lbs), 24-3 (16); **Elijah Garcia** (158½lbs), 14-0 (12), w rsf 4 **Amilcar Vidal** (159lbs), 16-1 (12); **Terrell Gausha** (156½lbs), 23-3-1 (11), w rsf 9 **Brandyn Lynch** (155½lbs), 12-2-1-2NC (9); **Travon Marshall** (145½lbs), 8-0 (7), w rsf 3 **Justin DeLoach Dock** (147lbs), 19-6 (10); **Samuel Teah** (141½lbs), 19-4-1 (8), w pts 8 **Enriko Gogokhia** (143lbs), 13-1-2 (8); **Miguel Angel Hernandez** (161lbs), 7-0 (6), w pts 6 **Dario Guerrero Meneses** (161 lbs), 1-4-1; **Albert Gonzalez** (125lbs), 4-0 (2), w rsf 2 **Joseph Cruz Brown** (122½lbs), 3-6 (1); **Anthony Cuba** (133lbs), 5-0 (3), w pts 6 **Darrel Harris** (130lbs), 7-21-2 (5); **Daniel Blancas** (168¼lbs), 5-0 (3), w rsf 1 **Kynndale Prather** (165½lbs), 3-16 (1).

Photos: ESTHER LIN/SHOWTIME

SCANT REWARD: Magsayo plays his part in a good fight, but fails to impress the judges

EVERLAST
FIGUEROA

THE LONG GAME: Figueroa increasingly finds the target on a tiring Magsayo as the fight goes deep

he had given Magsayo the round before, it evened things out.

Magsayo was exhausted and content to just see out the final round. He had come in a little over the 126lbs featherweight limit at the weigh-in and had to be reweighed two hours later. Figueroa pressed the action, but the CompuBox statistics showed him throwing far less than in past matches. But credit to Figueroa for not being denied. With the victory, Figueroa won the WBC's interim featherweight bauble; a scrap with that organisation's belt-holder, Rey Vargas, is expected to come next.

At one time, former 154lbs belt-holder **Jarrett Hurd** was a force, but after being pulled out at the start of the 10th round against **Armando Resendiz**, he can't be expected to be more than a gatekeeper going forward. Hurd was coming off of a 21-month layoff following a loss. Resendiz was supposed to be the type of opponent that would jumpstart his career, but the Mexican turned out to be a handful and even exceeded his trainer Manny Robles' expectations.

To say that Resendiz came to fight was an understatement. His high workrate never wavered. Hurd tried to match it and had moments of success, but simply could not maintain the torrid pace.

Medics stopped the fight during an inspection just seconds into the 10th round due to a bad laceration of Hurd's lip. Being that there was only one round left , not allowing Hurd to finish is testament to the severity of that cut. It would probably not have mattered anyway, being that Resendiz was up on all three scorecards, by margins of 89-82 and 87-84, twice.

Maryland's Hurd, 32, tried to box and concentrate more on defence than he had in the past. He jabbed hard and found the range with jolting rights. At the end of four rounds, things were going his way. But Resendiz, 24, never stopped coming forward and the energy drained from his opponent.

TALKING POINT

WHILE controversial decisions always put judging under the spotlight,there tends to not be any outcry about cards that are bad even if they pick the right winner. While Figueroa deservedly won, to suggest Magsayo had only taken two or three rounds was a bizarre interpretation to say the least.

The seventh round was a classic, conjuring up memories of Arturo Gatti vs Mickey Ward. The fans at the Toyota Arena (PBC promoted) roared with delight. The torrid pace continued until the end. There might be better middleweights than Resendiz, but you will be hard pressed to find one who can match his drive and desire. Ray Corona refereed.

Elijah Garcia, a 19-year-old from Arizona, created a buzz by sensationally stopping Uruguay's **Amilcar Vidal** at 2-17 of the fourth round of a scheduled 10. After a relatively even three rounds, southpaw Garcia forced Vidal to the ropes and hurt him with a right hook. A follow-up barrage sent Vidal to the canvas. Referee Jack Reiss immediately waved it off without bothering to count.

Terrell Gausha, from Cleveland, landed a beauty of a right that dropped Los Angeles' **Brandyn Lynch** at the start of the ninth round of their scheduled 10. Lynch went down twice more and it was stopped at 50 seconds of the round.

THE VERDICT **Figueroa gets the victory, while Resendiz steals the show and Garcia comes from nowhere to land on the world stage at just 19.**

YOUTH BEATS EXPERIENCE: Hurd [*right*] can't keep up with Resendiz

Photos: JENNIFER CHARLTON PHOTOGRAPHY

EVERLAST
DARLI
O.DAVIES

UP AND DOWN: Ritson's head is an inviting target, but a body shot will finish it

The reinvention

Roy Kelly watches in awe as Davies turns in the best performance of his career

NEWCASTLE
MARCH 4

★★★★☆ MAIN EVENT
★★★☆☆ UNDERCARD
★★★☆☆ ATMOSPHERE

OHARA DAVIES could be about to pull off one of the current era's great transformations after executing the best win of his career, the Londoner knocking out **Lewis Ritson** with a body-breaking left hook in the ninth round.

It has set up the 31-year-old with a shot at the WBA super-lightweight strap, currently in the possession of the Dominican Republic's Alberto Puello, who is scheduled to make his maiden defence on May 13 against American Rolando Romero.

A man with penchant for a ruck with his rival before getting anywhere near the ring, and a perennial pantomime villain, Davies dreams of making headlines, and this time made them for all the right reasons.

While he created some mischief by turning up in a Manchester United top in Newcastle for Thursday's) media conference just days after the Magpies had lost to them at Wembley, this was largely a new Davies. More respectful and less confrontational, this was a boxer intent on letting his fists do his talking. Or some of it.

And how his gloves did just that in a sparsely populated Utilita Arena, where Davies dismantled the hopes of home Toon favourite Ritson.

The 29-year-old Geordie, making his first appearance for a year, began confidently enough, with his trademark jab scoring well in the opening two rounds, during which time Davies missed with as much as he landed.

But by the third, Hackney's 'Two Tanks' began to exert himself. His right connected to the head of Ritson, while that dangerous left to the body began to find its mark.

While 'The Sandman' dug in better

in the fifth, it was his opponent who was dictating matters with some tasty left-right combinations in the sixth before hurting Ritson to the body in the seventh.

While Lewis appeared to stem the flow in the eighth, it was only a stay of execution. Some chopping rights to the head from Ohara in round nine stung his opponent, before a sickening left hook sent Ritson crashing to the floor, where he was counted out by referee Howard Foster at 2-23.

There was an equally ruthless performance from another away fighter in the night's other WBA final eliminator, when new featherweight sensation **Otabek Kholmatov** announced himself by brutally ending **Thomas Patrick Ward**'s long and proud unbeaten record – which had been tied at 33-0-1 with Tyson Fury for the longest in current British boxing – at 2-58 of round five.

Kholmatov arrived on Tyneside as something of an unknown quantity, but the secret is certainly now out. The Uzbekistan 24-year-old's amateur career was more steady than stellar, but as a pro based in Florida, his progress has been startling, blasting out his first nine opponents inside a total of 22 rounds.

A huge featherweight, he set about Ward in the first, flooring the West Rainton star with a left-right to the head. Ward, up at seven, saw out the round and fought back strongly in the second and third with some sharp combinations, and refused to buckle when Otabek connected with some heavy body work.

Brave Ward was forward again in the fourth and a three-punch salvo got his followers off their seats, only to be put down for a second time. Again, Ward beat the count at seven and gave as good as he got in the fifth, but the Uzbek's frightening power was decisive and a left hook to the head wobbled Tommy, with the right putting him down. This time there was no getting up and, after coach Neil Fannan threw in the towel, referee Mike Alexander called it off.

The two former Fannan team-mates can take heart and inspiration from **Lee McGregor**, who returned to his place of work after 13 long and difficult months by outpointing **Alexis Kabore** 79-74, from referee Ron Kearney.

These eight hard-fought rounds will have done Edinburgh's British, Commonwealth and European bantamweight champion the power of good after fending off a terrific effort from the Burkina Faso veteran. McGregor, now campaigning at super-bantam, began confidently and scored well with his left, with the stoppage specialist happily settling in for the long haul in a battle contested at close quarters.

Kabore earned his couple of points and played his part, with the pair going at it blow-for-blow in the seventh, before McGregor controlled the final three minutes expertly to finish on a high.

Unbeaten Cork prospect **Steven Cairns** impressed over six rounds against Poland's **Jakub Laskowski**, enjoying a 60-54 shutout from referee Neil Close. A sharp left hook to the body was a feature, while he couldn't miss when he brought his right through the middle.

Twelve months after leaving this arena in frustration after an horrific cut caused a premature end to his debut, **Ben Rees** was back in the ring and in a hurry to impress in a six-rounder against **Konstantin Aleksandrov**. The Ashington super-middle dropped the Bulgarian in the neutral corner when he followed a spiteful body combination with a left to the head. Kearney called a halt at 2-06 of the first.

In the night's other six-threes, Ritson's Forest Hall stablemate, **Ewan Mackenzie**, stretched his winning sequence to seven, against Sheffield's **Serge Ambomo**. The Jarrow southpaw dictated the pace and fight before Ambomo came on strongly at the end and, despite a rousing finale, conceded a 59-55 verdict with Mr Close in charge.

Bishop Auckland's **Nathan Forrest** opened the event with a smooth performance in defeating **Liam Fox** from Manchester, 40-36 from Mr Kearney.

Two well-supported Northeast boxers made winning debuts at the event promoted by Phil Jeffries. Ferryhill's **Callum Walton** was positive from the off and, when a left to the body put **Zdenko Bule** on the canvas, Mr Close counted the Croatian out at 2-21 of the second of a scheduled four.

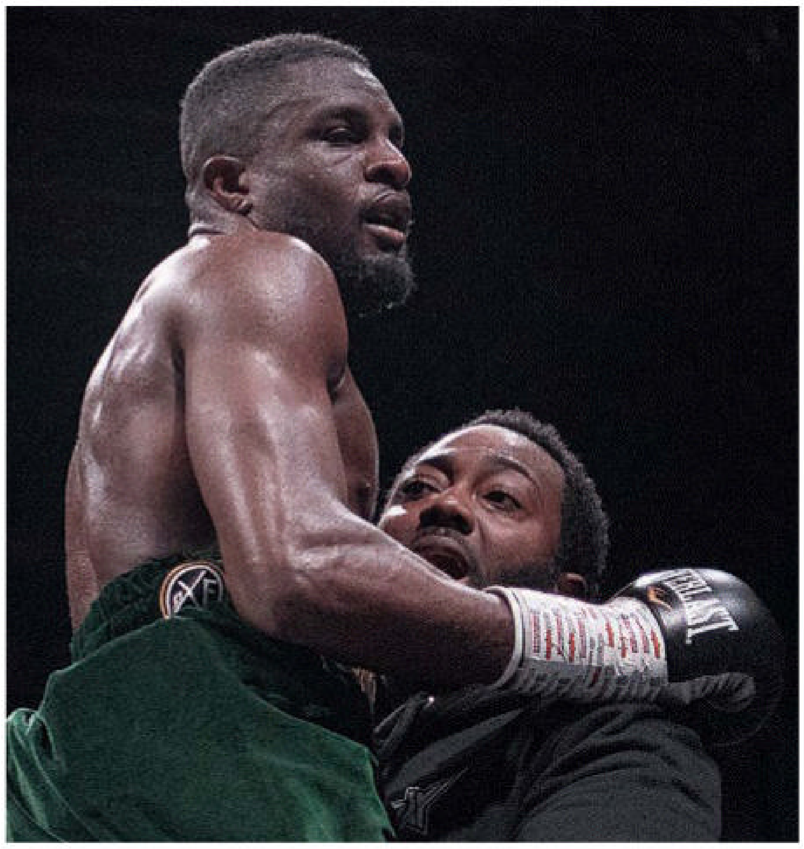
Horden super-feather **Syed Shear** was lively in both movement and delivery as he closed the show with a 40-36 verdict from Kearney over Venice-based Nicaraguan **Cristian Narvaez**.

THE VERDICT **Ritson and Ward will look to plot a way back after brave efforts, but the night belonged to the away corner after two stunning wins.**

TALKING POINT

AS we went to press last week, there was no mention of any broadcaster for this show, even with a well-matched, high-stakes double-header. It ended up on Fite.tv, but few fans realised in time. Similarly, the arena featured many empty seats. Clearly, a better job could have been done on promoting this, despite the quality of the headlining bouts.

HIS OWN MAN: Davies is no longer channelling his inner Mayweather



'The real me'

Davies admits he's grown up a lot in recent years

OHARA DAVIES cut an emotional figure after taking a decisive step closer to fighting for a sanctioning body title. Famed for his powerful right, it was the left hand which took him to victory over Lewis Ritson in their WBA super-lightweight final eliminator.

He put Ritson down in the ninth with a left hook to the body, the home hero counted out by referee Howard Foster.

The 29-year-old required lengthy treatment in the ring by medical staff before getting to his feet to congratulate Davies, who, showing great restraint and respect, had not celebrated victory.

But once the Forest Hall man had recovered, the Hackney star said: "When I first got into boxing, becoming a world champion was my dream.

"I'm getting close to my dream. I'm going to achieve my goal and my dream and become a world champion.

"I caught Lewis down there as part of the gameplan. We realised his body was open, but he's got a great guard. He kept on going and I went to the head and he didn't budge.

"My coaches said to keep going downstairs and I did it and it worked. I've sacrificed my life for this."

The 31-year-old added that what people were seeing now was the true Ohara Davies, not the man previously seen as an enfant terrible of British boxing.

"I feel like I've been acting a lot of my career," he said.

"I grew up watching Floyd Mayweather and I wanted to imitate that, but it's not me. I like Lewis Ritson and his family; there was nothing but respect."

As for Ritson, the 29-year-old told *BN* afterwards that a second world title eliminator defeat has shown him that the very highest level is probably out of his reach, but he will assess some new targets.

FULL RESULTS

Ohara Davies (139lbs), 25-2 (18), w ko 9 **Lewis Ritson** (139lbs 10oz), 23-3 (13); **Otabek Kholmatov** (125lbs), 11-0 (10), w rsf 5 **Thomas Patrick Ward** (125¾lbs), 33-1-1 (5); **Lee McGregor** (132lbs), 12-0-1 (9), w pts 8 **Alexis Kabore** (129lbs), 29-8 (8); **Ewan Mackenzie** (159lbs), 7-0 (3), w pts 6 **Serge Ambomo** (160lbs), 9-41-3 (4); **Steven Cairns** (136lbs), 5-0 (2), w pts 6 **Jakub Laskowski** (137lbs), 4-22-1 (2); **Ben Rees** (153lbs 10oz), 1-0-1 (1), w rsf 1 **Konstantin Aleksandrov** (153lbs 10oz), 10-62-4 (3); **Nathan Forrest** (143lbs), 3-0, w pts 4 **Liam Fox** (143lbs), 0-6; **Callum Walton** (169lbs), 1-0 (1), w ko 2 **Zdenko Bule** (153lbs 10oz), 0-6; **Syed Shah** (135lbs), 1-0, w pts 4 **Cristian Narvaez** (131lbs), 17-55-6 (2).

THIRD TIME LUCKY

Simon Euan-Smith watches Roberts become Area champion at last

BETHNAL GREEN
MARCH 3

★★★☆☆ WHOLE SHOW
★★★★☆ ATMOSPHERE

PAUL ROBERTS won the vacant Southern Area flyweight title, outscoring Bromley's **Harry Mullins** in an entertaining battle at York Hall.

Referee Mark Bates scored it an emphatic 98-91, presumably 8-2 in rounds with a knockdown giving Roberts the seventh by 10-8. I was initially surprised by the margin – it was a good, competitive bout, and Mullins, despite finishing with a large swelling below the left eye, certainly wasn't outclassed. Several sessions looked close.

Going in, Mullins had won six straight, while Roberts' tally was a modest 3-4-2 – but this included two unsuccessful cracks at the vacant Area super-flyweight belt last year – a draw and a points loss against Jack Hughes in this ring. Mullins was the "house" fighter, but Roberts (Chard) had brought a coachload of supporters from Somerset, who certainly added to the atmosphere.

Roberts started fast, looking to get close and land to the body. Southpaw Mullins stayed cool, looking to counter, and showed good head movement to make Roberts miss.

Things went back and forth in the fifth, with Roberts putting shots together, Mullins countering and finding the target, Roberts hitting back. Roberts dug in solid body shots, but Mullins came back, and there were good exchanges in the sixth.

The seventh was lively, with Roberts again pressing, Mullins countering, until a right clip to the head had the latter down. He was up quickly, but Mr Bates rightly administered the eight count.

Mullins made a big effort in the last, backing Roberts up against the ropes. At the bell, Roberts raised an arm while Mullins walked to his corner.

In the official top-liner, Liverpool's **Jack McGann** took his unbeaten run to nine (one draw) by forcing Hungarian **Laszlo Toth** to retire after five rounds. It had been scheduled for 10.

Toth was certainly in the fight for three and a half rounds, and there were some decent exchanges. In the third I noted "T outworking M?" and by the fourth McGann was looking puffy around the left eye. McGann was trapped in a neutral corner, and took some stick, but he smashed in a big right to the body that had Toth backing off, and McGann opened up to have Toth holding.

McGann piled on the pressure in the fifth, aiming to score in close. Toth hit back, but was bleeding from the nose and had a huge mouse under the left eye. He went on the run. With Toth's tank having apparently run dry, his corner retired him in the interval.

Robert Williams refereed and the judges were Terry O'Connor, Grzegorz Molenda and Olena Pobyvailo.

What looked an evenly matched bout proved nothing of the sort, with Chigwell's **Harvey Horn** stopping Catford's **Josh Nelson** in just two minutes of a scheduled six-rounder.

Horn scored first with a right to the head, but Nelson hit back – and it looked as if we were in for a hard-fought battle. There was a good exchange, but then Horn banged in a combination to the head that had Nelson helpless on the ropes, facing outwards. Referee Bates quickly waved it off.

Going in, Horn was 4-0 (all on points), Nelson 3-1 (1), with two wins since his sole defeat. He was in the "away" corner, though both are York Hall regulars, neither having boxed anywhere else as pros.

Amar Kayani (Slough) made it seven straight wins, clearly outscoring Estonian **Dmitri Protkunas** over six. Referee Kieran McCann scored it 60-54. The scoring was fair, but Protkunas did make an effort. He was always willing to come forward but got caught as he came in, Kayani picking his shots effectively. Protkunas bled from the nose and his face was marked up by the finish.

Courtney Bennett (Deptford) beat Estonian **Matt Metsis** over four, referee McCann scoring 40-36.

Though considerably heavier, Bennett looked altogether trimmer and used his height and reach advantages well. When a right staggered Metsis in the first, it looked as if it might not last long, but he hung in there, held when Bennett got close and duly went the distance.

Southpaw **Georgie Ellis** (Harlow) beat Birmingham's **Reiss Taylor** over four, Mr Bates scoring 40-36, and, in other fours there were wins for three debutants. Mr McCann gave 40-36 wins to Hoddesdon's **Alfie Gaskin** over York's **Harry Matthews** and Ashford's **Louie Muldowney** over previous Kayani victim **Iliyan Markov** (Bulgaria); and Mr Bates scored **Fayek Uddin** (Stepney Green) a 39-37 winner over Sheffield's **Karl Sampson**.

Neilson Boxing promoted in association with WMB.

THE VERDICT **Good-value Southern Area title bout, in the London small-hall tradition.**

Photo: PHILIP SHARKEY

Paule
HARRY

WORTHY WINNER: Roberts ***[left]*** takes the title, and Mullins' 0

FULL RESULTS

Paul Roberts (111lbs 5oz), 4-4-2, w pts 10 **Harry Mullins** (111lbs 3oz), 6-1; **Jack McGann** (153lbs 3oz), 8-0-1 (5), w rtd 5 **Laszlo Toth** (153lbs 1oz), 31-7-2 (19); **Amar Kayani** (151lbs), 7-0 (2), w pts 6 **Dmitri Protkunas** (151lbs 9oz), 3-5 (1); **Alfie Gaskin** (174lbs 1oz), 1-0, w pts 4 **Harry Matthews** (181lbs 3oz), 17-69-5 (2); **Louie Muldowney** (148lbs 7oz), 1-0, w pts 4 **Iliyan Markov** (149lbs 9oz), 6-23-2 (3); **Georgie Ellis** (115lbs 9oz), 3-0, w pts 4 **Reiss Taylor** (117lbs 3oz), 3-21 (1); **Courtney Bennett** (265lbs 3oz), 2-0, w pts 4 **Mait Metsis** (218lbs 2oz), 1-8 (1); **Fayak Uddin** (131lbs 6oz), 1-0, w pts 4 **Karl Sampson** (137lbs 1oz), 5-16 (1); **Louis Horn** (139lbs), 4-0 (1), w tko 1 **Josh Nelson** (137lbs 7oz), 3-2-1 (1).

AMAZING KO WIN

LIVERPOOL
MARCH 4

★★★☆☆ WHOLE SHOW
★★★☆☆ ATMOSPHERE

WHAT A SHOT: Willings uncorks a perfect left hook

DESPITE the intriguing English super-flyweight title clash between Birkenhead's Brandon Daord and Bristol's Ashley Lane being postponed just days before, this VIP Promotions show featured not only some exciting and competitive contests but also, in the revised headliner, one of the knockouts of the season so far.

After being stopped by Mickey Ellison for the Central Area light-heavy title at the same venue back in July, Liverpool's **Jake Barton** was looking to rebuild following a straightforward comeback victory in November. Equally, Widnes' **Leon Willings** was looking to recapture some of his early form after a shock reverse against Robbie Chapman six months ago.

With his own comeback win since, this bout – an eliminator for the Central Area title to be contested by Ellison and Thomas Whittaker-Hart in a rematch this Saturday – was finely balanced and was developing into such until, 56 seconds into the third round, Willings detonated a left hook to Barton's chin that dropped him to the canvas.

Referee Jamie Kirkpatrick counted to three before waving it over, with the medical team rushing into the ring. There was some concern when Barton received oxygen, but he thankfully rose to his feet after a few moments.

Prior to this, Willings, looking bigger than his opponent, had the power if not the variety of the local and this told in the second when he caught Barton with a solid uppercut that saw his knees dip and one touch the canvas. Kirkpatrick was quick to administer the eight count but, although Willings took the fight to Barton thereafter, it was the home fighter who expressed disappointment at the very end of the round when a smart right seemed to drop the Widnes man momentarily, but it was ruled a slip.

Gary Shaw is left wowed by Willings' one-punch finish

Galvanised if not aggrieved, Barton took the fight to Willings in the third, only to get caught spectacularly just as he threw an overhand right.

The first contest of the night was an exciting one, with Birkenhead's **Ben Burnham** a late stoppage winner over Yorkshire's durable **Jake Bray**, who could barely conceal his anger at referee David Mulholland stepping in with just 20 seconds of the four-rounder remaining. Although unhurt, however, the visitor was shipping shots, albeit not all connecting, without reply.

Liverpool's **Joe Kavanagh** and Luton-based Zimbabwean **Darryl Tapfuma** also put on a show in their six-round lightweight contest, a fact reflected in referee Steve Gray's 58-56 score for the local. The last round was the best, with both trading right up until the final bell.

Boxing out of Derry Matthews' stable in the city, Liverpool's **Charlotte Powell** proved to have too much for Swindon's experienced **Bec Connolly** over six-twos. Showing good variety, the local was a 60-54 winner on Steve Gray's card. Mr Mulholland refereed.

In an excellent learning fight, Liverpool's **Ethan Brown** had to work for his win over well-travelled Southampton-based Russian **Rustem Fatkhullin**, who was always in their four-round contest. Referee Jamie Kirkpatrick scored it 40-37.

Similarly, local cruiserweight **Nathan Quarless** ground out a decent 58-57 win over Mountain Ash's **Ethan King**.

Although the contest failed to catch fire as some others did on the night, there was good work from both throughout, with the more eye-catching shots coming from the home fighter. Mr Mulholland refereed, with Mr Fitzpatrick scoring.

Even accounting for the action in the main bout, the fight of the night was arguably Isle of Man native **Matt Rennie**'s 59-56 won over the more-than capable Greek **Efstathiuos Antonas**.

In December, the visitor had been noted by many as a dangerous opponent for any up-and-coming lightweights as, in an equally furious and fast-paced contest, he beat the aforementioned Fatkhullin at the same venue. So it proved here as, from the very first bell, there was no let-up from either fighter. Although Antonas had some success, the classier boxing, including a showreel duck, slip and left hook to the body in the second, came from Rennie, for whom victory was hard won but well deserved. Steve Gray refereed.

In a rematch of their November draw in Wigan, Liverpool's **Bryan Collins** dominated against experienced Spanish-based Nicaraguan **Berman Sanchez**. Steve Gray scored it 60-54, with Mr Mulholland refereeing.

THE VERDICT **Despite the headline bout being postponed, the action on display is entertaining.**

FULL RESULTS

Leon Willings (174¼lbs), 6-1 (2), w rsf 3 **Jake Barton** (174¼lbs), 8-2 (2); **Bryan Collins** (153¼lbs), 5-0-1, w pts 6 **Berman Sanchez** (154¼lbs), 30-38-4 (22); **Charlotte Powell** (124½lbs), 2-0-1, w pts 6 **Bec Connolly** (129¼lbs), 3-18; **Matthew Rennie** (144¼lbs), 9-0-1, w pts 6 **Efstathios Antonas** (142¼lbs), 3-1-1 (1); **Joe Kavanagh** (141¼lbs), 7-0, w pts 6 **Darryl Tapfuma** (135¼lbs), 0-7-1; **Nathan Quarless** (202¼lbs), 12-0, w pts 6 **Ethan King** (202¼lbs), 2-2 (1); **Ethan Brown** (140¼lbs), 4-0, w pts 4 **Rustem Fatkhullin** (144lbs), 8-54 (3); **Ben Burnham** (166¼lbs), 4-0 (2), w rsf 4 **Jake Bray** (162lbs), 3-15-2.

Battle tested

It's easy work for Deniz compared to sparring with the mighty Beterbiev

OLDHAM

MARCH 4

★★★☆☆ WHOLE SHOW

DROYLSDEN'S **Billy Deniz** marked his first fight since sparring with Artur Beterbiev by claiming a knockout win over Latvia's **Edgars Sniedze** at Oldham Leisure Centre.

The 22-year-old, who travelled to Canada to join Beterbiev in his camp for his world title clash with Anthony Yarde in January, followed up a stunning right uppercut with a left hand to secure victory after 2-20 of round three. Referee Andy Brook did not hesitate to wave off the contest, Sniedze having already been knocked down earlier in the round.

Earlier on the six-fight card, presented by Frank Duffin Promotions in association with Maree Boxing, Keighley's **Ibrahim Nadim** suffered a first professional defeat, at the hands of Bulgaria's **Tinko Banabakov**.

Nadim, trained by Ricky Hatton, came into the contest unbeaten in nine outings and with high hopes of claiming a title this year.

But Banabakov caused the 9-1 home fighter problems from the outset and few could argue when referee John Latham raised his arm in victory, having scored it 58-57.

One boxer who did stretch his perfect record to 10-0 on the night was Earby's **Josh Holmes**, who returned after 16 months out to earn a stoppage win over Zimbabwe's **Tatenda Mangombe**.

A high-tempo contest was waved off by Mr Brook after 1-33 of round five, with Holmes relentlessly hunting down his opponent and landing a barrage of punches.

Also maintaining unbeaten records were Burnley's **Reece Farnhill**, Bradford's **Tauseef Suleman** and Rochdale's **James Albert**.

Farnhill had to contend with a cut for much of his fight with Iran's **Bahadur Karami**, but he showed real grit and determination to take a 58-57 victory on Mr Latham's card.

Mr Latham officiated as Suleman beat Blackburn's **Naeem Ali** 40-36, while Mr Brook oversaw Albert's 39-37 win over Derby's **Nathan Junor**.

FULL RESULTS

Billy Deniz (181¾lbs), 8-0 (5), w rsf 3 **Edgars Sniedze** (183½lbs), 6-37-1 (6); **Tinko Banabakov** (126lbs 5oz), 5-1 (1), w pts 6 **Ibrahim Nadim** (126lbs 9oz), 9-1 (2); **Josh Holmes** (136¾lbs), 10-0 (3), w rsf 5 **Tatenda Mangombe** (134¾lbs), 1-6; **Reece Farnhill** (160lbs ~1oz), 8-0 (3), w pts 6 **Bahadur Karami** (162¼lbs), 1-3-1 (1); **Tauseef Suleman** (147¾lbs), 3-0, w pts 4 **Naeem Ali** (150½lbs), 2-101-1 (1); **James Albert** (179lbs 14oz), 4-0-1 (1), w pts 4 **Nathan Junor** (187¾lbs), 3-15-1 (2).

Boom boom

Dascalu in a hurry, writes **Daniel Herbert** from ringside

BETHNAL GREEN

MARCH 4

★★★☆☆ WHOLE SHOW

GOODWIN Boxing's first show of the year saw an explosive performance by former London amateur champion **Andrei "The Boom" Dascalu**, who needed just one minute 51 seconds to dispatch Julian Lilyanov in their super-middleweight six.

Dascalu, a Romanian who boxes out of the Stonebridge club in North London, hurt his Bulgarian opponent with a right before driving him to the ropes. When two more big shots made Lilyanov sag, referee Kieran McCann intervened.

Also winning a six inside the distance was popular London welterweight **Dean Gardner**, although the ending was odd. Gardner's relentless pressure had experienced Barling southpaw **Justin Menzie** moving and covering up, yet while Menzie was not punching back, he didn't seem in any particular distress when referee Mark Bates intervened at 2-44 of round three.

Fight of the night was the super-bantamweight four that saw Tottenham-Romanian **Andrei Santa** get off the floor to outpoint **Nabil Ahmed**.

They exchanged freely throughout, with Santa generally landing more but leaving gaps in his defence – which his Batley opponent exploited to drop him with a left-right in round three. Santa reasserted himself to win the last and get home 38-37 for Mr Bates.

In a featherweight six, Luton southpaw **Frankie Storey** thumped the body throughout for a 60-54 verdict (Mr McCann) over **Jake Pollard**. Bradford's Pollard resisted stoutly for three rounds but then resorted to clinching to reach the final bell.

McCann awarded a 40-36 mark to Crawley's **Sher Khan** after he scored well with rights against Canning Town southpaw **Lee Hallett** in a super-lightweight four.

The better variety and faster hands of Exeter welter **Harry Webb** earned him a 40-36 tally from Mr Bates against Sheffield's **Paul Scaife**.

FULL RESULTS

Andrei Dascalu (166lbs 7oz), 5-0 (2), w rsf 1 **Julian Lilyanov** (168lbs 3oz), 1-3; **Dean Gardner** (151lbs 1oz), 3-1 (1), w rsf 3 **Justin Menzie** (152lbs 5oz), 5-17-1 (1); **Frankie Storey** (125lbs 9oz), 4-0, w pts 6 **Jake Pollard** (124lbs 10oz), 0-44; **Harry Webb** (146lbs 10oz), 8-1, w pts 4 **Paul Scaife** (147lbs 5oz), 1-27; **Andrei Santa** (123lbs 2oz), 3-1, w pts 4 **Nabil Ahmed** (120lbs 2oz), 1-14-2; **Sher Khan** (139½lbs), 3-0, w pts 4 **Lee Hallett** (141½lbs), 1-57-2.

Sharp blunted

Andy Whittle watches a workout for Derrick and a 100th defeat for Darryl

NOTTINGHAM

MARCH 4

★★★☆☆ WHOLE SHOW

WELL-supported **Derrick Osaze** sent his supporters home happy from Harvey Hadden by claiming a 60-54 win over Middleton's ultra-resilient **Darryl Sharp** who, despite being under the cosh from the outset and picking up a badly bloodied nose late on, refused to buckle. It was Sharp's 100th defeat. Newark's Kevin Parker refereed.

Worksop's popular **Marcus Ellis** impressed in taking all four rounds against tough Mexican **Fernando Valencia**. A nice mixture of shots was more than enough to see his arm raised by third man Chris Dean.

A shutout awarded by the same official was reaped by Nottingham's **JR Smith**. He proved both too busy and too accurate for Padiham's **Seamus Devlin**, who picked up a nasty cut to the scalp when heads clashed in the third.

Heanor girl **Hannah Jones** fell victim to Czech **Ester Konecna** banking a first inside-distance win in their scheduled six. Backed into a neutral corner, Jones was saved at 1-09 of the fourth by triallist referee Ryan Churchill.

A slated four between Chesterfield first-timer **Jimmy Nicholson** and Nicaraguan **Cruz Perez** ended at the halfway stage when trainer Jason Shinfield pulled Spireite out after he was tagged flush by heavy head shots. Referee was Chris Dean.

Selston super-middleweight **Joe Collings** won 40-35 over Southwark man **Victor Edagha** who, in his first bout for three years, and sadly not having changed his style one iota, proved dreadful and was docked a point by Mr Churchill for persistent spoiling.

A heavyweight meeting between Nottingham's **Lamah Griggs** and Brummie **Joel Ducille** was scored 39-37 by Mr Dean, the local man having the better of it.

FULL RESULTS

Derrick Osaze (169lbs 9oz), 12-1 (2), w pts 6 **Darryl Sharp** (175¼lbs), 7-100-1 (1); **Frazer Morgan** (113lbs 7oz), 4-0, w pts 6 (60-54, RC/KP) **Alejandro Torres** (111lbs 9oz), 2-16 (1); **Ester Konecna** (155lbs 5oz), 3-20-1 (1), w rsf 4 **Hannah Jones** (154lbs 1oz), 0-2; **Marcus Ellis** (164½lbs), 4-0 (1), w pts 4 **Fernando Valencia** (166lbs 6oz), 9-46 (5); **Lamah Griggs** (250lbs 6oz), 2-6, w pts 4 **Joel Ducille** (227lbs 7oz), 1-2-1; **JR Smith** (165lbs 3oz), 2-0 (1), w pts 4 **Seamus Devlin** (169lbs), 1-51-1; **Joe Collings** (170lbs 1oz), 1-1-1, w pts 4 **Victor Edagha** (175¼lbs), 2-72-3 (1); **Jimmy Burnside** (121lbs 3oz), 3-0, w pts 4 (39-37, RC/CD) **Sean Jackson** (122lbs 5oz), 0-6-1; **Cruz Perez** (133lbs 9oz), 3-7 (1), w rtd 2 **Jimmy Nicholson** (123lbs), 0-1; **DJ Tollerton** (137lbs 7oz), 3-0, w pts 4 (40-36, CD) **Reynaldo Cajina** (134lbs 6oz), 15-75-5 (11).

FLAT OUT:
Estela can take no more against the impressive Fiero

Photo: MELINA PIZANO/ MATCHROOM

THE HEAVYWEIGHT FRINGE

Gassiev returns in farcical encounter, while Kabayel wins the European title after coming through unexpected storm, writes **Eric Armit**

FEBRUARY 3

YEREVAN, ARMENIA

In his first fight since August, MURAT GASSIEV, 30-1 (23), continued his heavyweight campaign with an unsatisfactory second round KO of MIKE BALOGUN, 20-1 (16). Gassiev just shadowed Balogun around the ring in the first. Balogun tossed an occasional jab and a couple of rights, but Gassiev hardly threw a punch in anger. In the second Gassiev stuck out a couple of jabs that had Balogun retreating to the ropes and Gassiev then drove a powerful right to Balogun's head. Balogun went down face-first on the canvas. He then rolled over to a kneeling position, not facing the referee. When the referee completed the 10-count Balogun immediately got to his feet with no sign of even a slight wobble.

NORTHRIDGE, AUSTRALIA

A new star in the making for Australia? In only his second professional fight light-flyweight ALEX WINWOOD, 2-0 (2), scored three knockdowns and stopped Indonesian TIBO MONABESA, 21-2-2-1NC (8), in the fourth round. Winwood represented Australia at the Commonwealth Games, the World Championships and the 2020 Olympics.

FEBRUARY 4

BOCHUM, GERMANY

Hometown fighter AGIT KABAYEL, 23-0 (15), survived near disaster to win the vacant European heavyweight title with a third-round stoppage of Croatia's AGRON SMAKICI, 19-2 (17). Kabayel marched forward in the first round, with the taller Smakici using his longer reach to spear Kabayel with right jabs and straight lefts. Kabayel decided to up the pressure in the second. He forced Smakici to the ropes and drilled in a hard right. Smakici fired back with a left to the head and suddenly Kabayel's legs shook. He was badly dazed and Smakici pounded him with a series of punches that had Kabayel tottering to the ropes. As he slid down, he grabbed the top rope and hung there. As the ropes were holding Kabayel up, the referee stepped in and gave him a count. When the action resumed, Smakici battered Kabayel around the ring. Kabayel was holding desperately to survive and, incredibly, Smakici had suddenly punched himself to exhaustion. He was now the one under fire at the bell. In the third, Smakici had nothing left and he was driven around the ring with Kabayel landing punch after punch. Kabayel wrestled the Croatian to the canvas and it was painful to see Smakici clawing his way up the ropes to his feet. The fight should have been stopped then, but even as Kabayel was again raking Smakici with head punches the visitor was still, more by instinct than intent, pushing out counters, so the referee let it continue. A pair of heavy hooks dropped Smakici to his knees, but he again struggled to his feet. After the eight-count, Kabayel exploded another couple of rights to the head and the referee at last stopped the fight.

In other heavyweight fights, ALEX FRANK, 22-0-1 (19), floored Azeri RUFAT HAJIYEV, 8-1 (4), in the sixth and twice more in the seventh to force a stoppage, and ILJA MEZENCEV, 24-2-0-1NC (20), finished Finn SAMI ENBOM, 19-11 (11), with a body punch in the first round.

BARCELONA, SPAIN

Frenchman WALID OUIZZA, 17-2 (8), captured the vacant European Union super-lightweight title with a split decision over local favourite ALEJANDRO MOYA, 17-1 (10). Over 12 hard-fought rounds, Ouizza's strength overcame Moya's better skills. Instead of standing off and boxing, Moya allowed himself to be dragged into a close-quarters battle and paid the price as Ouizza won on scores of 117-111 and 115-113 with the third judge giving it to Moya at 116-115.

CULIACAN, MEXICO

Matchroom's ANGEL FIERRO, 21-1-2 (17), scored another impressive stoppage victory when he finished Uruguay's EDUARDO ESTELA, 14-2 (9), in the seventh round at lightweight. The Mexican forced Estela to the ropes in the fourth, where he landed a huge right uppercut to score a knockdown at the end of the round. It was all Fierro and, as he again unleashed his firepower, Estela could take no more by the seventh. He slumped to the deck as the referee jumped in to save him. Afterwards, Fierro called out pretty much all the main names at lightweight.

MERIDA, MEXICO

Super-bantamweight prospect ALAN PICASSO, 24-0-1 (13), took a while to beat the resistance out of a lively KEVIN VILLANUEVA, but eventually the power and accuracy of Picasso's punches literally brought Villanueva to his knees. Villanueva was a late substitute, but he rolled forward from the first, firing hooks and uppercuts. He gave Picasso some uncomfortable moments, but was soon fading under neck-snaping jabs and left hooks to the body. Villanueva was on shaky legs at the end of the fifth and a savage onslaught in the sixth saw him drop to his knees and his corner threw in the towel. There is now talk of a fight with Luis Nery.

AZEEZY AS 1-2-3

Holed up in a cheap motel in Florida, Dan Azeez is staying humble as his long-term plan to conquer the world gathers pace

BY DECLAN TAYLOR

Portrait:
LAWLERNCE
LUSTIG/
BOXXER

Sunbo

ON JANUARY 28, when Anthony Yarde was dropped and stopped by the great Artur Beterbiev in London, two other British light-heavyweights watched on from a sofa more than 4,000 miles away in Florida. Dan Azeez and Callum Smith, both trained by Buddy McGirt, had headed over to the Hall of Famer's pad to watch the clash at the very top of their division that sunny evening on the east coast.

There is a chance Smith may face Beterbiev later this year, so the Liverpool puncher was naturally keeping a close eye on proceedings. For Azeez, who openly admits he is probably 18 months away from a fight of that magnitude, it was a chance for him to see where he is heading. What's more, the South Londoner knows Beterbiev well, having spent time in camp with him as a sparring partner during 2022. He knows what is required for him to reach the Russian's level.

For Azeez, that has meant relocating to America for his training camps under McGirt and the aforementioned friendship with Smith. "Callum does his sessions before me, but he's a proper cool guy," Azeez explains. "I like him.

"We hang out a bit; we watched the Yarde and Beterbiev fight together at Buddy's. We're at different stages of our career and have the same trainer, so we probably won't fight – he can't be in both corners at the same time.

"I didn't know him before this, but I remember I used to watch him when he was an amateur, I used to think 'this guy's sick!' It's nice that he's here. He laughs a lot. Buddy's crazy, so everyone is just mixing and gelling.

"I'm heading into European level and he's elite, at the top end of the tree. There's no awkwardness there. We haven't sparred yet, either."

Azeez's first test at that level comes this weekend in Villette, the vibrant Paris neighbourhood, when he faces European champion Thomas Faure. Despite being the challenger, 33-year-old Azeez arrives in the French capital a favourite.

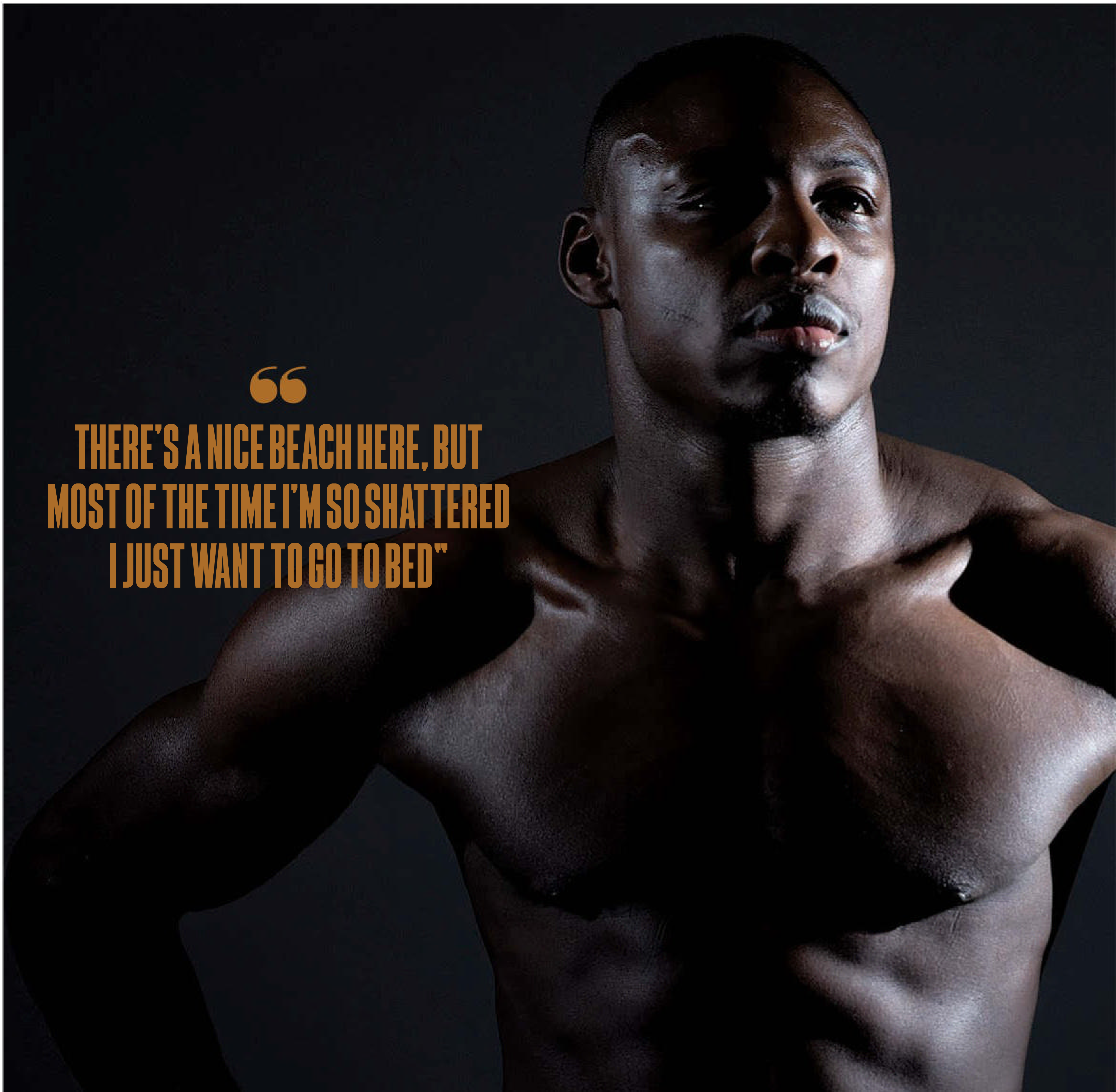
"I know nothing about [Faure]," Azeez admits.

It is put to him that Faure has already been worn down and stopped by a shorter opponent in his career.

"But that was 2019," he counters. "He could have changed so much since then. Like when I fought Shakan Pitters in September, I'm a totally different fighter from then. I don't take too much notice of previous fights three or four years ago – I know what I was like then and I'm definitely not the same fighter now.

"They're all tall and long compared to me – I'm a midget. I'm 5ft 10ins, just about.

Photo: LAWRENCE LUSTIG/BOXXER



> “THERE'S A NICE BEACH HERE, BUT MOST OF THE TIME I'M SO SHATTERED I JUST WANT TO GO TO BED”

Like when I see Callum Smith I think 'bloody hell, you're huge'. But then again, I think that about everyone compared to me."

Azeez has famously done all the required hard yards on the domestic front, claiming Southern Area, English and British titles – something no other light-heavyweight in history has managed. He then picked up the Commonwealth title last time out, stopping Rocky Fielding in eight rounds, and now he has the European belt in his sights.

"It's just so when I get to world level, I've taken all the necessary steps," he adds. "So I should be ready and should feel comfortable being up there. I won't feel like I need more experience or that I've missed anything out – I'll know I'm ready.

"I'm on a mission, happy to go wherever is necessary. I just want these belts, man. It would be nice to be British, Commonwealth and European champion. I've done all the domestic belts, so I want the rest now."

Azeez believes his switch to America can only help to facilitate that goal. For his last camp, he and McGirt spent time in Los Angeles, where they were joined by Dillian Whyte as he prepared for his clash with Jermaine Franklin. This time, Smith is around while Sugar Hill Steward and his fighters Lawrence Okolie and Ben Whittaker have also been on the scene in Florida.

AMBITIOUS: While Azeez accepts he's a work in progress, he says he would fight Artur Beterbiev right now

"I've been with Buddy since the beginning of last year," he says. "It's been good.

"Last time, Dillian was there, so it was good to have him around – he's another funny guy. There are other fighters, like Zhanibek [Alimkhanuly], too – it's a good bunch of fighters, man.

"It's nice, it's hot, it's quite regimented: training, rest, training, rest. Last time I was in LA, this time I'm in Florida and I'm just in a motel. I'm a bit of a cheapskate – no fancy hotels for me. You can ask Ben Shalom how much it is per night! My day is just motel, gym, motel.

"There's a nice beach here, though, where I can chill; that's a nice, calm environment, but most of the time I'm so shattered I just want to go back to my bed and relax. I'm up about 6am, have a run on the beach, have a nap, then do my boxing training at 1pm – bag work or pads – then I eat and chill before I come back to the gym at about 8pm for my strength and conditioning. It's hot out here as well and that takes it out of me.

"It's good, because it feels like a real camp for me; I'm away from family and friends and focused on nothing but training. It's a different experience. Boxing away from home hardens me and hopefully when I get out there and fight, it doesn't have an effect on me."

After linking up with McGirt, Whyte spoke at length of his admiration for the trainer, suggesting that he is one of the few 'teachers' still operating at world level in the sport.

Llike Whyte, Azeez has bought into McGirt's methods entirely and believes he will only improve with every fight alongside the New Yorker.

"It has been brilliant being trained by him," Azeez says. "And it's great being out here. He's funny, has loads of stories, lots of experience.

"It has been really, really good. He says he has the patience to deal with my bullshit and my non-driving ass. He says I can't drive because the seat is on the left side, so I struggle a little bit, but I'm getting better at it.

"I like it here, though. I mean, the food in America is so fatty, so that doesn't really help, but I've got a good metabolism and I eat quite well.

"I miss some of the British food – your fish and chips and English breakfasts. Obviously I miss my family too, but I'm on a mission, man, I just put that to the back of my mind and get on with it."

The European title is the next box he wants to check and Azeez is unusually honest when it comes to assessing his standing on the world stage. He is not currently inside the top 10 at 175lbs, while his compatriots Smith, Yarde, Joshua Buatsi and Craig Richards all are. Victory in Paris may just nudge him closer to that quartet.

He has often been the forgotten man of his division in this country but, should he finish this year injury-free and stull undefeated (he is currently 18-0), there is every chance he could be in line to fight for a version of the world title in 12 months' time.

"It all depends," he says. "It depends on how much I'm developing. Buddy says I need a lot of work. It all depends, it's about getting the right fights at the right time.

"Personally, I'm up for whatever, but we'll see how it goes. But by the end of the next 12 months I want to be fringe world level, ready to take whatever opportunity comes up."

It has been reported that world No.1 Beterbiev and No.2 Dmitry Bivol could reach an agreement to meet in a light-heavyweight superfight before the year is out. Should Beterbiev win, he may decide to move up in weight or even retire, which could present Azeez and the rest of the chasing pack with a chance to stake their claim for top spot.

Azeez said: "When I was out there in Montreal with him during his training camp before he fought Joe Smith, he said he just wants to get all the belts. Obviously in that fight he beat Smith and got the WBO. Now, it's only one missing, against Bivol.

"Once that's done, he will probably go up to cruiserweight or something. Then the belts will scatter and there will be opportunity there, too.

"But right now there are loads of domestic fights that can happen as well. I'll be honest, as much of a beast Beterbiev is, it would be a good showdown between us two, I wouldn't mind fighting him either. You might think it's best to stay away from him, but when you're in this sport, you take challenges. If I'm up there being considered as one of the best, it's only right to fight the others.

"If Bivol cannot get hit as much as Yarde did, then he has a very good chance. But trust me, man, Artur has crazy power. You don't want to get hit by that too often, you don't want to get tired against him, or end up on the ropes against him. I rated Yarde's chin in that fight; there were times when Artur proper let go on him."

So, what was going through his mind as he watched his old sparring partner bludgeon a potential opponent toward an eighth-round defeat?

"As a fan, I thought it was a brilliant fight and really enjoyed it," Azeez says. "So did Callum.

"I thought Yarde did very well and he can hold his head high. I don't think it came too soon, but Beterbiev is a great fighter with a lot of experience. If he [Yarde] keeps chipping away, he will get there, but he's fighting the best guy in the division, the monster. When I get to that world title level, Yarde should be there too.

"If you look at the top 10 in most of the sanctioning bodies, there are so many British fighters in there. We've got a good crop in this country and it's an exciting time.

"It's funny how life works out, though – one minute you're seen as domestic rivals, next you're training together in Florida.

"But I'm not thinking too far ahead – it really is one fight at a time." **BN**

★★★★★ OUTSTANDING ★★★★ GOOD ★★★ FAIR ★★ DISAPPOINTING ★ RUBBISH

The star ratings indicate how well the writer believes the fighters match up, the fight(s)' contextual significance, and how good the fight(s) will be

Photo: FRANCK FIFE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

MAIN EVENT: Olympic champ Tony Yoka aims to rebound from his first defeat as a pro

French evolution

★★★☆☆ MAIN EVENT

★★★☆☆ UNDERCARD

Azeez travels to France to challenge for European title, while Yoka tops the bill against the ever-reliable Takam, writes **Declan Taylor**

DAN AZEEZ will head to Paris for the next stop on his whistlestop journey towards world title contention.

The 33-year-old is already the first light-heavyweight to win all of the British Boxing Board of Control belts at domestic level, and then added the Commonwealth title to his collection by beating Rocky Fielding in December.

Now he has been rewarded with this crack at European champion **Thomas Faure**, the 21-4-1 (2) Frenchman. Faure, is from Chateauroux, around 170 miles south of Paris, where this fight takes place.

Azeez has been one of the unsung heroes of British boxing since Covid hit in 2020. He has done the business all over the country. He won English title fights in Kirkby and Bolton, won the British in London and then defended it in Liverpool before December's triumph in Bournemouth. A little trip across the Channel is unlikely to faze him.

"I want to be the king of Europe," he said. "So why not go and fight for the title anywhere in the continent?"

This fight had been scheduled to take place at the Wembley Arena last month, but it was postponed when Azeez fell ill during January. He had hoped to land on a card in England, perhaps the Manchester one headlined by his former stablemate and one-time amateur opponent Lawrence Okolie on March 25, but he has been sent to France instead. The show is a co-promotion between Boxxer and All Star Boxing and will be broadcast on Sky Sports here in the UK and Canal+ in France.

Azeez admits he knows little of Faure, and he is not alone. The Frenchman has never boxed outside his home country and has not had a fight since he won the vacant European title back in January 2022.

That night he claimed a unanimous decision over his compatriot Kevin Thomas Cojean who dipped to 27-10-2 (11) as a result of the defeat. It was a rematch of their 10-round draw a year earlier. He has also previously gone the 10-round distance with Tony Averlant, who was stopped in one round by Joshua Buatsi and seven by Anthony Yarde.

Indeed, Faure will have grown accustomed to distance fights over the course of his career, with just two stoppage victories out of 21 so far. He has also been beaten inside the distance only once, against Eddy Lacrosse back in 2018.

Azeez may take some confidence from the nature of that seventh-round finish from Lacrosse who, like him, is a shorter, compact light-heavyweight who closed the distance to the rangey Faure, routinely slipping inside his long levers and working on the inside. Faure appears to like keeping things long, but 5ft 10in Azeez has made a living from making things uncomfortable for taller opponents.

As such, expect Buddy McGirt-trained Azeez to wear Faure down throughout the first half of the fight before turning the screw and forcing a stoppage between rounds six and nine to claim the belt.

That clash, however, is not the main event at the Zenith de Paris, the 6,000-seater arena a few miles north of the city centre in La Villette. At the top of the bill, Paris-born heavyweight **Tony Yoka** takes on fellow Frenchman **Carlos Takam** as he attempts to rebuild from the first defeat of his career last time out.

> **'I WANT TO RULE EUROPE, SO I'LL FIGHT ANYWHERE ON THE CONTINENT'**

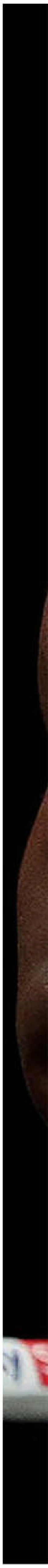


Photo: JAMES CHANCE/GETTY IMAGES

REIGN MAN: Seven of Azeez's past 10 bouts have been for legitimate championships

On May 14, 2016 Olympic champion Yoka dropped a majority decision to Martin Bakole in what was his only fight of 2022, but he will get back on the horse with what looks like a stern test against Cameroon-born, Nevada-based Takam, a former opponent of Anthony Joshua, Joe Joyce and a plethora of other top heavyweights.

At 42, however, Takam is well past his best and is coming off two consecutive defeats: one, that sixth-round knockout by Joyce and most recently, in September, a 10-round unanimous decision reverse at the hands of Arslanbek Makhmudov.

Yoka, 30, should be too young and fresh for Takam at this stage and a points win in this 10-rounder seems most likely. If Yoka is serious about ever challenging for world titles, he cannot afford to slip up against an ageing Takam here.

As well as Azeez, there is other British interest on the card with Wales' **Lauren Price** vying to continue her steady progress as a professional when she takes on Germany's 6-1 (4) **Naomi Mannes**, whose last outing was a defeat to Englishwoman Kirstie Bavington for the European welterweight title in November, and who will do well to last the distance with a fit and firing Price.

Price, who has won her first two outings as a professional with little trouble, has fond memories of Paris, where she booked her spot for the 2020 Olympics, and it is unlikely that she will taste defeat here. The 28-year-old, from Ystrad Mynach, went on to win gold in Tokyo and looks even better suited to the professional game.

"I was proud to represent Great Britain all over the world in my amateur career," she said. "And going to Paris, where I qualified for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, for my third professional bout gives me a similar feeling.

"I know that Naomi Mannes recently challenged for the European title, so she's definitely a step up in competition. I can't wait to get over to France and show the world what I've been working on."

There is also a run-out for Wythenshawe's **Macaulay McGowan**, who has won three four rounders since he was beaten over 10 rounds by 48-year-old Sergio Martinez last year. He takes on home favourite **Farrhad Saad**, who is 8-0-1 but is yet to finish a fight inside the distance.

McGowan, trained by Joe Gallagher, has mixed at a far higher level than Saad and will be hoping to make his experience count on the night. The Englishman knows a win here could fire him into far bigger fights under the Boxxer banner in the future.

THE VERDICT **At home and abroad, Azeez is doing things the old school way.**

Tim's Time?

★★★☆☆ MAIN EVENT
★★★☆☆ UNDERCARD

Tszyu wanted to fight Charlo. Instead, he gets the only man to beat him as a pro, writes **Elliot Worsell**

WHEREAS for many people Christmas Day is a day for giving and for smiling a little wider and for being a little nicer, for **Tim Tszyu** last year's was, sadly, a break from tradition.

For it was on that day he learned that a world super-welterweight title fight against Jermell Charlo, set for January, had been postponed due to an injury suffered by Charlo. That was the day, therefore, that Tszyu's plans for 2023 fell apart just as he was allowing himself to get excited. Empty-handed, he had no presents to speak of and was instead left with the sinking feeling of someone who had woken up expecting to receive one particular gift only to find that item on their wishlist had been ignored.

The Australian smiled through the pain, of course, but it couldn't have been easy for Tszyu to think about entering 2023 with his plans upended. It was no doubt a relief, then, that it didn't take long for his team to set about cheering him up, first lobbying the WBO for a vacant interim title shot in Australia, and then, once that had been granted, seeking an opponent to give Tszyu the kind of test he had been expecting from Charlo.

This led Team Tszyu to the door of **Tony Harrison**, the only man to defeat Charlo, and who agreed to fight Tszyu on March 12 in Sydney as soon as the opportunity was presented to him. Similarly, Tszyu, despite the temptation to wait for Charlo to recover, didn't need to be asked twice when offered Harrison.

"Every fight you take is all on the line," Tszyu said. "You're one punch away from going back to the very bottom. It's all on the line and a gamble, but this is what I do.

"[Harrison] was the next best available option. I'm at that stage of my career where I really don't care who is in front of me. I'm ready to take them all out."

TALKING POINT

JERMELL CHARLO'S shadow will undoubtedly hang over this contest, and not just because it was supposed to be him against Tszyu earlier this year. If Harrison wins here, he could earn himself a rubber match with the super-welterweight world champion.

Certainly, one gets the sense Tszyu is a man impatient and a man fed up with forever being known as Kostya's son and merely a great prospect. At 28, and with 21 pro fights under his belt, he feels the time is now, both to announce himself on the world stage and also to discover for himself just how far he can go towards replicating the feats of his legendary father.

To date, and with plenty of attention on him, Tszyu has hardly put a foot wrong, impressing many with his cool, calm and unflappable demeanour. No matter the size of the shadow from which he seeks to escape, Tszyu appears the same every time he fights and has made continual step-ups without ever looking like coming undone.

Only in his last fight, in fact, back in March 2022, did Tszyu, 21-0 (15), show signs of fragility and, perhaps, frustration. Indeed, it was last year against Terrell Gausha, another American, when Tszyu found himself knocked down in the first round via a stiff right hand, after which he struggled to assert his usual dominance, indicated by the eventual scorecards (114-113, 116-111 and 115-112). Very unlike Tszyu, who is typically so measured and assured, Gausha managed to rattle him early and then box well for much of the fight, always on the retreat but able to cover up well and get off with his own counterpunchers from time to time.

Lesson learned, Tszyu, a year later, now goes into this fight against Harrison knowing he will need to be better than he was against Gausha. Because Harrison, although stopped three times as a pro, is a man renowned for his relentless pressure, his unbreakable spirit, and his ability to spring an upset.

His 2018 win against Charlo, a fight in which he outhustled a champion whose record then read 31-0, demonstrated all that makes Harrison such a nuisance and delivered the Detroit native the WBC super-welterweight belt. Fighting hard from first bell to last, he refused to give Charlo a moment's rest and was a deserving winner after 12 rounds, taking the belt by scores of 115-113, 115-113 and 116-112. That win not only confirmed Harrison as a force to be reckoned with but was well-earned, too,

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THAT'LL DO NICELY: Neither Tszyu nor Harrison gave it a second thought when offered this match

Photo: MARK METCALFE/GETTY IMAGES

THE SON RISES:
As a legend's offspring, Tszyu is keen to create a legacy of his own

Photo: MATT KING/GETTY IMAGES

following a tough career which had seen him rebound from losses against Willie Nelson in 2015 and Jarrett Hurd in 2017 (both nonth-round stoppages).

All he had to do now was repeat the victory over Charlo in the pair's rematch – yet, unfortunately for Harrison, this he wasn't able to do. Instead, a year later, Charlo came out stronger in the return, dropping Harrison in the second round and then twice more in the 11th, the round in which the fight eventually ended.

From there, with wounds licked, Harrison, 29-3-1 (21), returned with a draw against Bryant Perrella in April 2021 before a year later scoring a solid 10-round decision win against Sergio Garcia, the former European super-welterweight champion from Spain.

Now, almost 12 months on from that, Harrison steps up once again, hoping to this time fare better than he did against Charlo second time around.

"I am the only 'world championship' fighter he has fought," the 32-year-old American said of Tszyu. "I am the first one and I am probably going to be the last because he's going to go back to the bottom and have to rebuild this stuff back up.

'HE'S NOT WEAK, BUT TO SAY HE'S LIKE KOSTYA, IT'S A LITTLE TOO MUCH'

"He's not a weak kid. but to say he's like Kostya Tszyu, I think we're giving him just a little too much."

That may be true, and undoubtedly comparing Tim and Kostya, while only natural, runs the risk of sounding premature, particularly when dealing with achievement. However, the new Tszyu has shown enough in his 21 fights to date to be confident of adding Harrison to his list of victims and, with the backing of both his father and home support, one expects him to come through this test – the biggest of his career – by decision.

On the Sydney undercard, meanwhile, unbeaten super-bantamweight **Sam Goodman**, 13-0 (7), gets another decent test in the form of **TJ Doheny**, 23-3 (17), who, while 36 years of age and nearing the end of his career, has never been stopped in an 11-year pro career and should provide the fast-rising Australia with some resistance over the 10-round distance.

THE VERDICT **Any potential coronation will have to wait, but this is a fine barometer of Tszyu's place in the world rankings.**

VETERANS COLLIDE

McIntyre and Summers clash in well-matched affair for the English title

FIGHTZONE is in Wolverhampton on Friday night when **Joel McIntyre** defends his English light-heavyweight title against local **Ricky Summers**.

It is a clash of veterans. Champion and challenger are both 35. McIntyre made his pro debut in November 2010; Summers two years later. Both have retired and come back – more than once.

McIntyre, who last year abseiled down Spinnaker Tower to raise cash for Ringside Charitable Trust, said enough was enough after a loss to Miles Shinkwin for the St George's belt in December 2018.

"I wanted a normal life," the Portsmouth man said, but discovered the nine-to-five wasn't for him, got back in the gym and ended up silencing a noisy crowd in Newark by stopping Chad Sugden (12-2-1) in eight rounds last July for the vacant English title.

The finishing punch that brought McIntrye, 20-5 (5), the championship for a second time was a perfect right-hand reply, but he couldn't slip and counter the shots Lyndon Arthur threw at him in Newcastle last December. McIntyre took that at 18 days' notice and it didn't take Arthur long to find the gaps in his hands-down style, coolly picking his punches to finish him in the second.

Summers here has his second crack at English honours. In April 2021, he lost a split decision to 12-0 Dan Azeez.

The Londoner said afterwards that "grit and hunger" pulled him through in the second half, but Summers was always in it and steadied Azeez in the ninth with a right hand to the chin.

Summers has boxed only once since, a routine points win last July improving his record to 18-3-1 (6).

From nearby Wombourne, Summers has always given a good account of himself. He pushed Frank Buglioni (19-2-1) in a British title challenge in July 2017, was outpointed by Andre Sterling (9-0) in a British title eliminator after scoring a second-round knockdown and went on to draw with Lawrence Osueke (9-0) and lose – tightly – to Azeez. He is around an inch taller at 6ft 2ins and the pick is for him to jab his way to a points win.

Also in Wolverhampton, European welterweight champion **Kirstie Bavington** (7-2-2) faces Canada's **Kandi Wyatt** (10-4) over 10.

Wyatt has boxed in higher class, having twice challenged for world honours, losing to Jessica McCaskill last time out. But the momentum – and crowd – are with Bavington.

The 30-year-old has won and defended the European belt since Wyatt was stopped in seven by McCaskill in December 2021, and she can keep her winning run going by grinding out a points victory over 10-twos.

Pure ambition

Collins and Beech Jnr are eager to be crowned the champion of Britain in a tasty-looking affair in Glasgow, writes **Matt Bozeat**

NATHANIEL COLLINS gets the chance on Friday night to add his name to the list of 10 Scottish men who have held the British featherweight title.

The 26-year-old southpaw from Bearsden meets **James Beech Jnr** for the vacant belt in Glasgow's Double Tree Hilton Hotel. Collins also makes his third defence of the Commonwealth championship on a non-televised show promoted by Sam Kynoch. This fight is deserving of a wider audience.

Collins, 11-0 (5), is a talented box-puncher who was crowned Commonwealth champion in only his eighth fight, while Beech Jnr, 15-3 (2), is an ambitious pro from Walsall who's making his second bid for British and Commonwealth honours.

In July 2020, Brad Foster beat him with a strong start and finish at 122lbs, before Beech went on to suffer losses to Chris Bourke (pts 10) and Dennis McCann (rsf 8).

For some, those results suggested Beech, whose father was also a pro, may have settled into the role of tough opponent, but the 25-year-old, living in Bloxwich, is way too proud for that and handed Birmingham's Raza Hamza (17-0-1) his first loss, over 10 rounds in Coventry in December to secure this shot.

Both Collins and Beech are tidy technicians and though Beech is listed as two inches taller, Collins appears to have the edge in most departments.

The 26-year-old looks to have quicker fists and feet and there's more weight behind his punches. The southpaw stance has troubled Beech, as well. The last two left-handers he faced – Bourke and McCann – beat him well.

Bourke (9-0) hurt Beech early and went on to dominate, while McCann (12-0) dropped him twice and stopped him in eight.

Those two fights were made at 122lbs and 124lbs, respectively. Collins is a solid 126lbs, hard to hit and always in range or on the edge of it to keep opponents under pressure.

The 2018 Commonwealth Games rep stepped up to championship level in only his eighth pro fight and dominated long Ghanaian southpaw Felix Williams (29-2) for the vacant Commonwealth belt, pushing him back from the opening bell and then keeping the punches coming in the third to drop him for the stoppage.

Collins then broke down South Africa's Thembani Mbangatha (11-0) in his first defence and, last time out, he kept Welsh southpaw Jacob Robinson (9-0) quiet for most of the 12 rounds. He had Robinson down in the eighth after the challenger mounted a rare attack and barely took a punch himself until the ninth when he held his feet more and suffered a bloody nose.

Collins has done everything that's been asked of him so far, but Beech would no doubt think that everyone the Scot has beaten, he could beat as well.

Collins made Williams and Robinson look like novices with his hand speed and ring generalship, and Beech will surely bring more than them. He's a gritty competitor whose dreamt of wearing the Lonsdale Belt since he started watching boxing on television with his father as a boy.

Beech is sure to give his all, but we don't think it's going to be enough on Friday night. Collins can win a very watchable encounter on points.

In a well-matched chief-support, Airdrie's **Ben McGivern**, 4-2-1, tackles Drumgoon's **Dominic Doneghan**, 7-4-1 (1). The vacant Celtic middleweight title is on the line over 10 rounds – a distance that neither fighter has been scheduled for before.

REINVIGORATED: Beech [*left, with Jazza Dickens*] was not content to settle in to an opponent role after two title-fight defeats

IN A HURRY:
11-0 Collins has already won and twice defended the Commonwealth belt

Photo: KYNOCH BOXING SCOTLAND

KYNOCH
BOXING GYM

HALLOWED HALL

York Hall stages two events with worthwhile encounters on each

ON Friday night at the famous Bethnal Green venue, **Ramez Mahmood** (13-2) and **Jordan Purkiss** (5-0) contest the vacant English bantamweight championship. The fight was pushed back two weeks after the Alex Dilmaghani-Liam Dillon British-title bill topper fell through.

The following night, there are two Southern Area belts up for grabs. Plymouth's **Connor Adaway** (5-0) can outpoint Oxford's **Lewis Frimpong** (6-0) for the 130lbs strap and up at 175lbs, **Paul Brown** (7-0) should have too much for Bromley's hittable **Jack Owen** (5-0-2) and take the belt back to Ramsgate.

The undercard features the return of colourful 12-1-1 Derby puncher **Arfan Iqbal**, now up at heavyweight.

He started out as a light-heavyweight in 2011, but he had the punch to win English honours at 200lbs and spar Tyson Fury.

The punch that brought him the St George's belt was a right-hand counter that crashed on to Wadi Camacho's jaw, but when they met again for the vacant Commonwealth title in November 2018, Iqbal was ruled out in the seventh after injuring his back.

Family commitments have kept Iqbal out since then but, now 31, he can ease back by outpointing **Jake Darnell** (1-13).

BEST OF THE REST

ON Saturday night in Leicester, **Kyle Haywood**, a 31-year-old southpaw who grew up in the city before moving to the village of Earl Shilton, defends his Midlands Area super-welterweight title against **Ryan Amos** (9-0-1) in a rematch.

They drew over 10 rounds in September, but expect Haywood (10-1-1) to use the ring more this time and win on points.

Meanwhile, at the Bradford Hotel on the same night, evergreen 41-year-old **Jimmy First**, 14-0 (4), defends his Central Area lightweight title against Amthorpe's **Josh Padley**, 9-0 (1), over 10 rounds. Padley, only 27, might have been the favourite before First upset Cori Gibbs in December, so what we have here is exactly what we like – a 50/50 scrap that looks certain to be heartily contested.

Photo: ALEX LIVESEY/GETTY IMAGES

UP AGAINST IT: But Cullen is aiming to upset Pacheco's – and Matchroom's – plans

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Pacheco and Davies Jnr step up to co-headliners after Smith is ruled out

★★★☆☆ WHOLE SHOW

CALLUM SMITH using Pawel Stepian as target practice was not one of the can't-miss fights of 2023, but its cancellation, due to the Englishman suffering an injury, has surely affected the appeal of this Saturday's event at the Echo Arena.

So, instead of seeing Smith warming up for a proposed shot at light-heavyweight champion Artur Beterbiev, fans in Liverpool and DAZN subscribers will have to make do with two 10-rounders in co-headline slots.

The curtain closer will be Matchroom's 21-year-old hotshot **Diego Pacheco**, 17-0 (14), doing battle with the owner of boxing's finest nickname – "Little Lever's Meat Cleaver" – **Jack Cullen**, 21-3-1 (9), over 10 rounds in the super-middleweight division.

Before that, Kirkby's **Robbie Davies Jnr**, 23-3 (15), takes on 34-year-old Irish southpaw **Darragh Foley**, 21-4-1 (9) in a super-lightweight contest.

The jury is still out on Pacheco, but he unquestionably has lots of potential. From Los Angeles and standing a wiry 6ft 4ins, he started boxing at the age of 10 and won numerous amateur titles before signing professional terms with Matchroom at the end of 2018. Now trained by Jose Benavidez Snr, this marks his first appearance as a headliner and it's his debut in the UK.

The occasion shouldn't phase him. He has appeared on several huge cards in the past, with his two most recent bouts (stoppage wins over Enrique Collazo and Ricardo Adrian Luna) among the support for Saul Alvarez-Gennadiy Golovkin III in September and Juan Francisco Estrada-Roman Gonzalez III in December.

Cullen, only an inch shorter at 6ft 3ins, should provide a solid test. The 29-year-old saw a run of good form, which included a draw with Zak Chelli and wins over John Docherty and Avni Yildirim, snapped when he encountered another revered unbeaten international opponent, France's Kevin Lele Sadjo. That December 2021 bout was won by Sadjo in six rounds. Cullen's only action since then was a straightforward eight-round points win over Vladimir Belujsky last April.

Though Cullen always comes with ambition, the momentum is very much with Pacheco. A win for the home fighter is not the outcome Matchroom will be hoping for, with the American very much being groomed for big things. Hearn calls Pacheco one of the best prospects in the world, whereas the fighter himself believes victory here will see him turn from prospect to contender.

"They're all saying he's a superstar," Cullen, who had been sparring Callum Smith and is trained by Michael Jennings, observed. "But if he thinks he's coming over here and just getting someone he's going to step over, he's got another thing coming. He's making a big mistake."

Pacheco, who has relocated to Seattle to train full-time with Benavidez after growing tired of Los Angeles, is unlikely to come badly prepared. The studious youngster, who is fighting to provide for his family, is a regular sparring partner of David Benavidez and is eager to improve. Expect Cullen to give this all he's got, but the pick is for Pacheco, an artful body puncher, to again underline his potential with a stoppage in the second half.

Davies Jnr, on a three-fight win streak, is enjoying life with coach Shane McGuigan but was disappointed when Aussie Liam Paro had to pull out of Saturday's show after fracturing his skull in training. Substitute Foley, who lives in Sydney, could give Robbie a hard fight, nonetheless.

A 34-year-old southpaw, Foley has fought predominantly in his adopted Australian homeland, but his three appearances in British rings all ended without victory. In 2018, his Glasgow bout with Chris Jenkins ended in a technical draw after three rounds, and Akeem Ennis Brown beat him over 10 at York Hall. The following year, over the same distance, Foley was dropped in the eighth before coming up short on the cards in Belfast. In each of those three contests, Foley was competitive and we expect a similar scenario here, with Davies taking the verdict.

In another 10-rounder, 27-year-old Warrington southpaw **Rhiannon Dixon**, 7-0, should be favoured to edge out Wombourne's **Vicky Wilkinson**, 5-0-1, over the distance. The vacant Commonwealth lightweight title is the prize for the winner of this well-matched contest.

Cards generally don't get cancelled when heavyweight **Johnny Fisher** is on them, such is the support he guarantees. More than 1,000 fans of "The Romford Bull" are expected to make the trip north to watch the improving 27-year-old, 7-0 (6), take on 37-year-old Italian **Alfonso Damiani**, 6-2 (2), over eight rounds.

Also in action: Liverpool's excellent super-bantamweight portsider **Peter McGrail**, 6-0 (5), is scheduled to tackle his second 10-rounder; Hyde's **Campbell Hatton**, 9-0 (3), fights Italian **Michel Gonxhe**, 4-2-1 and there are runouts for Oldham lightweight **Aquib Fiaz**, Chester super-middleweight **Paddy Lacey** and Billericay's **George Liddard**.

THE VERDICT **Lacking a bona fide star attraction it might be, but important that the show goes ahead so the fighters can get paid.**

World rankings

In conjunction with the Transnational Boxing Rankings. As of March 6, 2023

HEAVYWEIGHT

No weight limit

1. **Tyson Fury**
2. **Joe Joyce**
3. **Deontay Wilder**
4. **Anthony Joshua**
5. **Andy Ruiz Jnr**
6. **Dillian Whyte**
7. **Otto Wallin**
8. **Luis Ortiz**
9. **Joseph Parker**
10. **Frank Sanchez**

CRUISERWEIGHT

200lbs/14st 4lbs

Champion: **JAI OPETAIA**

1. **Mairis Briedis**
2. **Lawrence Okolie**
3. **Badou Jack**
4. **Richard Riakporhe**
5. **Aleksei Papin**
6. **Chris Billam-Smith**
7. **Yuniel Dorticos**
8. **Ilunga Makabu**
9. **Mateusz Masternak**
10. **Arsen Goulamirian**

LIGHT-HEAVYWEIGHT

175lbs/12st 7lbs

Champion: **ARTUR BETERBIEV**

1. **Dmitry Bivol**
2. **Joshua Buatsi**
3. **Callum Smith**
4. **Joe Smith Jnr**
5. **Gilberto Ramirez**
6. **Anthony Yarde**
7. **Jean Pascal**
8. **Craig Richards**
9. **Igor Mikhalkin**
10. **Ali Izmailov**

SUPER-MIDDLEWEIGHT

168lbs/12st

Champion: **CANELO ÁLVAREZ**

1. **David Benavides**
2. **Caleb Plant**
3. **David Morrell**
4. **John Ryder**
5. **Carlos Gongora**
6. **Pavel Silyagin**
7. **Christian Mbilli**
8. **Demetrius Andrade**
9. **Vladimir Shishkin**
10. **Eric Bazinyan**

MIDDLEWEIGHT

160lbs/11st 6lbs

Champion: **Open**

1. **Gennady Golovkin**
2. **Carlos Adames**
3. **Jaime Munguia**
4. **Liam Smith**
5. **Zhamibek Alimkhanuly**
6. **Erislandy Lara**
7. **Sergiy Derevyanchenko**
8. **Felix Cash**
9. **Esquiva Falcao**
10. **Michael Zerafa**

SUPER-WELTERWEIGHT

154lbs/11st

Champion: **JERMELL CHARLO**

1. **Brian Castano**
2. **Sebastian Fundora**
3. **Tim Tszyu**
4. **Tony Harrison**
5. **Erickson Lubin**
6. **Israil Madrimov**
7. **Magomed Kurbanov**
8. **Jesus Ramos**
9. **Liam Smith**
10. **Bakhram Murtazaliev**

WELTERWEIGHT

147lbs/10st 7lbs

Champion: **Open**

1 **Errol Spence Jnr**
2. **Terence Crawford**
3. **Yordenis Ugas**
4. **Vergil Ortiz Jr.**
5. **Jaron Ennis**
6. **Eimantas Stanionis**
7. **Cody Crowley**
8. **Roiman Villa**
9. **Alexis Rocha**
10. **Radzhab Butaev***

SUPER-LIGHTWEIGHT

140lbs/10st

Champion: **JOSH TAYLOR**

1. **Regis Prograis**
2. **Jose Carlos Ramirez**
3. **Arnold Barboza Jr.**
4. **Jack Catterall**
5. **Subriel Matias**
6. **Jose Zepeda**
7. **Gary Antuanne Russell**
8. **Steve Spark**
9. **Teofimo Lopez**
10. **Sandor Martin**

LIGHTWEIGHT

135lbs/9st 9lbs

Champion: **DEVIN HANEY**

1. **Gervonta Davis**
2. **Vasily Lomachenko**
3. **Ryan Garcia**
4. **William Zepeda**
5. **Frank Martin**
6. **Isaac Cruz**
7. **George Kambosos Jnr**
8. **Gustavo Daniel Lemos**
9. **Jeremia Nakathila**
10. **Jamaine Ortiz**

SUPER-FEATHERWEIGHT

130lbs/9st 4lbs

Champion: **Open**

1. **Oscar Valdez**
2. **Hector Garcia**
3. **O'Shaquie Foster**
4. **Joe Cordina**
5. **Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov**
6. **Roger Gutierrez**
7. **Lamont Roach**
8. **Eduardo Ramirez**
9. **Robson Conceicao**
10. **Emanuel Navarrete**

FEATHERWEIGHT

126lbs/9st

Champion: **Open**

1. **Mauricio Lara**
2. **Rey Vargas**
3. **Brandon Figueroa**
4. **Luis Alberto Lopez**
5. **Mark Magsayo**
6. **Leigh Wood**
7. **Josh Warrington**
8. **Kiko Martinez**
9. **Isaac Dogboe**
10. **Michael Conlan**

SUPER-BANTAMWEIGHT

122lbs/8st 10lbs

Champion: **Open**

1. **Stephen Fulton**
2. **Murodjon Akhmadaliev**
3. **Luis Nery**
4. **Ra'eese Aleem**
5. **Takuma Inoue**
6. **Marlon Tapales**
7. **Azat Hovannisyan**
8. **John Riel Casimero**
9. **Kevin Gonzalez**
10. **Liam Davies**

BANTAMWEIGHT

118lbs/8st 6lbs

Champion: **Open**

1. **Emmanuel Rodriguez**
2. **Jason Moloney**
3. **Nonito Donaire**
4. **Vincent Astrolabio**
5. **Gary Antonio Russell**
6. **Alexandro Santiago**
7. **Keita Kurihara** *
8. **Ryosuke Nishida**
9. **Paul Butler**
10. **Reymart Gaballo**

SUPER-FLYWEIGHT

115lbs/8st 3lbs

Champion: **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**

1. **Roman Gonzalez**
2. **Bam Rodriguez**
3. **Kazuto Ioka**
4. **Joshua Franco**
5. **Fernando Martinez**
6. **Srisaket Sor Rungvisai**
7. **Andrew Moloney**
8. **Junto Nakatani**
9. **Kosei Tanaka**
10. **Donnie Nietes**

FLYWEIGHT

112lbs/8st

Champion: **Open**

1. **Sunny Edwards**
2. **Artem Dalakian**
3. **Julio Cesar Martinez**
4. **David Jimenez**
5. **Ricardo Sandoval**
6. **Angel Ayala**
7. **Seigo Yuri Akui**
8. **Taku Kuwahara**
9. **Muhammed Waseem**
10. **Felix Alvarado**

LIGHT-FLYWEIGHT

108lbs/7st 10lbs

Champion: **KENSHIRO TERAJI**

1. **Jonathan Gonzalez**
2. **Masamichi Yabuki**
3. **Hiroto Kyoguchi**
4. **Hekkie Budler**
5. **Daniel Mattelon**
6. **Sivenathi Nontshinga**
7. **Elwin Soto**
8. **Regie Suganob**
9. **Hector Gabriel Flores**
10. **Nhlanhla Tyirha**

STRAWWEIGHT

105lbs/7st 7lbs

Champion: **Open**

1. **Knockout CP Freshmart**
2. **Petchmanee CP Freshmart**
3. **Melvin Jerusalem**
4. **Erick Rosa**
5. **Wanheng Meenayothin**
6. **Daniel Valladares**
7. **Rene Mark Cuarto**
8. **Oscar Collazo**
9. **Ginjiro Shigeoka**
10. **Masataka Taniguchi**

AMATEUR SCENE

The very best action, previews and news from Olympic-style boxing

SEND us your club's news, results or upcoming events to bn.ed@kelsey.co.uk or 01959 541 444

THE battle that's tearing amateur boxing apart continues with the International Boxing Association taking action against countries boycotting their forthcoming World Championships.

IBA has opened disciplinary proceedings against the heads of USA Boxing, Boxing Canada, Czech Boxing Association and Boxing New Zealand.

In total, 11 countries have withdrawn from the Women's and Men's World Championships.

> IBA to punish those who boycott World Championships while the IOC insist they are responsible for Olympic qualifiers

They are protesting against governing issues in a bid to save boxing from Olympic expulsion and the decision to lift the ban on Russian and Belarusian boxers competing.

Great Britain announced they won't be sending fighters to the Women's World Championships that start in New Dehli next week and are considering whether they should pull out of the Men's World Championships in Uzbekistan in May.

IBA announced last month that its World Championships will be qualifiers for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

That claim has been denied by the International Olympic Committee.

The IOC say they are organising the qualifiers for the 2024 Olympics in Paris and the first is the European Games in June.

Ireland's decision means Amy Broadhurst won't be going for back-to-back World Championships.

Broadhurst, Olympic champion Kelly Harrington and Christina Desmond all won gold at the Strandja International

Photo: ALEX LIVESEY/GETTY IMAGES

NO DOUBLE: Broadhurst will not be going for back-to-back championships

Crisis brewing

LAST EIGHT:
But injury forced Walsh to withdraw in the quarters
Photo: LUIS ROBAYO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Tournament in Bulgaria.

Gold for Broadhurst, last year's World, European and Commonwealth Games champion, was especially satisfying.

She jumped up to 66kgs for the Irish Elite Championships in January and was beaten in the final by Grainne Walsh.

Walsh made an early exit from the Strandja tournament and Broadhurst went all the way to gold, winning four bouts.

In the semi-finals, Broadhurst outpointed Charlie Cavanagh, the World Championship silver medallist from Canada.

She followed with a unanimous points win over Leonie Muller (Germany) in the final.

Broadhurst said before the final she had "seen a comment after the Elite final that me moving up to 66kg was going to take years off my life and was too big of a jump.

"Here is my response. What a way to bounce back."

Harrington went up from 60kgs to strike gold at 63kgs, outpointing Keona Sam-Sin (Netherlands) in the final and, up at light-middleweight, Desmond, European silver medallist last year, outpointed Barbara Marcinkowska (Poland) in the final.

Aidan Walsh, bronze medallist at the Tokyo Olympics, was forced out of the light-middleweight quarter-finals in Bulgaria through injury.

Wins over Daniel Krotter (Germany) and Dev Nishant (India) took him through to the last eight, but he had to withdraw from his bout with Nurislom Ismoilov (Uzbekistan).

Dean Walsh, who beat Aidan in the semi-finals of the Irish Senior Championships, had two wins before bowing out to Denmark's Nikolai Terteryan.

> 'THEY SAID ME MOVING UP TO 66KG WAS GOING TO TAKE YEARS OFF MY LIFE'

NACS COUNTDOWN

The impressive Uddin is hoping to retain his title

DOMINIC INGLE took one look at Hamza Uddin and gave him his phone number.

"Videos of me boxing when I was a schoolboy went viral," said Uddin, "and when Dominic saw them, he gave me his number. He told me I was better than Naz was at his age."

Fast forward eight years and Uddin is preparing to defend the NAC flyweight championship.

England Boxing announced the 19-year-old from Fearless ABC in Walsall is one of eight defending champions who have been seeded No 1 for this year's championship.

That means Uddin enters at the quarter finals, held in Rotherham on Saturday, April 15.

The finals are held in Newcastle eight days later.

Uddin is just glad to be fighting again. He hasn't boxed since winning the NACs last April.

"I entered three tournaments," he said, "but there were pull outs in all three. I went in the BUCs, Three Nations and Hull Box Cup – and everyone else pulled out.

"I asked GB if I could go in the NABGCs at the end of last year, but they wanted me on a camp instead. Having quality sparring is better than having a rubbish fight that doesn't teach you anything."

Uddin was added to the Great Britain squad towards the end of last year, but he admits that as a schoolboy, boxing broke his heart. He lost in three national finals.

"The first one was close, could have gone either way, but I definitely thought I won the other two," said Uddin, who first went to Pleck ABC as an eight year old and now boxes for Fearless ABC in Walsall. "It was gut-wrenching. I got all the way to the final and thought I had won it.

"But it spurred me on to do well in the juniors."

Uddin went on to win the NACs at the first attempt last year. He followed a semi-final points win against Mykyle Ahmed (Manor) with a first-round stoppage of Thom Marley (Lambton Street).

"I think he (Marley) thought he could bully me," said Uddin. "Once I got the uppercut going it was over. I saw he was hurt and stuck it on him."

The uppercut was also a punch that worked for Uddin's boyhood hero.

"I watched Naz before I even started boxing," he said. "I had shorts like his, with tassels on them."

Uddin sees himself as a world champion in the pros one day, but before he makes the switch, he plans to become a seasoned amateur international.

"I've won golds at international Box Cups," he said, "but I haven't been to a major championship yet.

"The European Youth Championships were called off because of covid and I didn't go to the European Juniors because I was too light. I'm looking to get as much international experience as I can.

"The plan is to win the NACs and then go for the European under-22s in October."

First, he defends the NAC title he won by winning four bouts 12 months ago. Uddin started last year's championship at the Midlands finals as an unproven teenager and goes into his defence as the No 1 seed. But he shrugs off the pressure, saying: "It's just a label. I'm just a fighter trying to win the title, like all the others. Being No 1 seed doesn't make any difference.

"The only difference from last year is that I've had been up in Sheffield getting good sparring."

Full list of GB seeds

Male: Under 51kg – Hamza Uddin (Fearless); Under 57kg – Jack Dryden (Birtley); Under 63.5kg – Cameron McKay (White Hart Lane); Under 71kg – Dan Toward (Birtley); Under 86kg – Isaac Okoh (Dagenham); Under 92kg – Damar Thomas (Powerday Hooks).

ROUGH AND READY: But Welland's style failed to impress GB

OUT TO IMPRESS PAC MAN

Hoddesdon's Tom Welland heading to Asian Games in the hope of winning place on Philippines national team

THE new Manny Pacquiao could be a teenager from Essex!

Hoddesdon featherweight Tom Welland has enjoyed a real purple patch, winning his last 15 bouts since September, all by either unanimous points decision or stoppage.

There was a spell towards the end of last year when Welland had nine bouts in 10 weeks in four different countries – and won them all.

There was a jaw-dropping one-punch KO on his senior debut in Sweden that's had thousands of views on the internet and in Cardiff last month, Welland scalped Owain Harris, bronze medallist at last year's Commonwealth Games.

Days after the win over Harris that secured England's 7-5 win over Wales, Welland revealed he has been asked to train with the Philippines national squad that is funded by Pacquiao.

The plan is for the 18-year-old from Wickford to be sent to Asian Games in China in September where places at next year's Paris Olympics will be contested.

"I'm half Filipino," explained Welland, who teamed up with Sab Leo at Hoddesdon around December, 2021 after previously being at West Ham.

"My mum is from Philippines and somebody from the Philippines got in touch with me.

"They saw me box at the King of the Ring in Sweden and said: 'There's a place on the Olympic boxing team if you fancy it.'

"I'm going out for five weeks to train with the team and then there's the Asian Games in September.

"If I get a medal there, I qualify for the Olympics. Manny Pacquaio is funding the boxing team so I'm sure he will be floating around. I think he will like my style."

Welland said: "I'm a left-handed orthodox boxer and can box southpaw, like Pacquiao. England haven't really shown much interest in me. I'm not a stand up, straight puncher. I'm a rough, inside fighter and Great Britain don't really like that. I went for World Championship selection and they picked the boy who stood up and boxed over me. I thought: 'Maybe this isn't for me.'

"The Philippines got in touch over Christmas and I couldn't turn this opportunity down.

"I think any English boxer in my situation would do the same. My face didn't seem to fit at GB and I didn't have any other options. I was looking for a different avenue and then this came along."

Next for Welland, who won Best Youth Boxer at both the HSK Box Cup and King of the Ring tournaments last year, is the NACs that start later this month.

Given his form, he clearly has nothing to fear and his last win was one of the best on his 35-3 record.

"I fight at 57kgs and it was made at 55kgs," he said of the match with Harris.

"I came down from 60 kgs and it was hard. The hardest part for me was making the weight, but I was 60 kgs by the time I got in the ring and I was bigger than him physically.

"It was a home show for him. He only loved 15 minutes away, so I knew I had to go and give it to him. I knew he was their golden boy. I caught him early and after that he was taking a step back all the time. He didn't want to know. I think the knockout in Sweden got me a reputation. He saw that and wanted to stay away from my right hand and that allowed me to land body shots. I'm known for being a body puncher."

The punch that knocked out 47-bout veteran Alvin Warukata in Sweden was a short right hand and Welland followed that with a unanimous points win over Nebil Ibrahim, who beat Niall Farrell at last year's European Championship.

Welland gave him a count in the first round.

"I was 13 when I started boxing," said Tom. "I was playing football for Cambridge United. They wanted me to sign up for the FA Youth League. They wanted me to do strength and conditioning and I went to a boxing gym.

"I ended up deciding not to sign the contract and I never went back to football. I've got mates at Spurs now who are on £20,000 per week. Boxing has to pay off for me now!

"I was never big enough to be a footballer anyway. I'm only 5ft 8ins and at 14 I was playing two years up against lads who were 6ft 3ins.

"And I didn't like the idea of having a great game, the goalkeeper having a nightmare and me ending up on the losing side."

Welland may not even be the best boxer in his own house, however. Teenage sister Ella starred at the Golden Girl Box Cup in Sweden. "She boxed people's heads off," said Tom, proudly.

"She beat two Swedish girl and then got an Irish girl in the final who she had sparred before.

"Ella was a bit nervous before the final, but she hit her with a right hand early on and then picked her off. Ella could end up at the Olympics as well."

CLEAN SWEEP FOR LIMEHOUSE

Crolla and co in attendance to watch some terrific boxing in Central London

Photo: RUBY FLASHMAN

BOXER OF THE NIGHT: Morris celebrates

HOLBORN

FEBRUARY 24

LIMEHOUSE BOXING ACADEMY (featuring guest boxers from Rainham and Ropes and Glory) boxed eight entertaining senior bouts in front of a packed audience at the Grand Connaught Rooms on February 24. It was a clean sweep in the end for the East London boxing club and guests - Limehouse winning 8-0 - but the overall result didn't reflect the closeness of some of the contests.

The bout of the night saw Limehouse BA's **Amo Singh** (62kg) win a 3-2 split decision over the experienced **Will Hewett** (62kg) of Leigh Boxing Club. In a highly skilled three-threes, Singh started strongly and sharply as he forced a standing eight count in the first round with a series of crisp shots out of his southpaw stance. Hewett closed the gap with a busier second round but Singh secured the win by upping the pressure in the third.

With stars of the ring Anthony Crolla, Maurice Hope and Moses Itauma watching on, the Limehouse team had built an unassailable lead by the interval as **Terri Naylor** (50kg) took a well-deserved unanimous verdict over the game but outgunned **Mille Symonds** (guesting for Merseyside from St Ives BC). England international **Frankie Wood** (58kg) of Ropes and Glory BC then took the tie beyond any doubt when he stopped the plucky **Sidiqi Safiullah** (Golden Gloves) with a series of powerful counters that forced a stoppage in the second round of the senior bout.

Boxer of the night – as voted by Anthony Crolla – went to **Ramone Morris** (57kg) of Limehouse BA in a lively encounter with **Mahbub Rahman** (59kg) of Golden Gloves. Morris gave away weight but commanded the bout from centre ring with a sharp and busy lead hand and some eye catching bursts. The Mersey boxer pushed Morris all the way but the Limehouse man came out on top with a 3-2 split decision after three-twos of exiting action. The show closed with a commanding performance from Limehouse BA's NABC 80kg champion, **Joachim Johnson** against **Badra Toure** from the Golden Gloves in Liverpool.

Joachim came out quickly and with intent as he forced a standing eight within the first 40 seconds, with a couple of sharp straight right hands. Toure tried to stand his ground but the referee called a halt after another series of hurtful shots from the Limehouse man and the bout was called off after 2-00 of the first round.

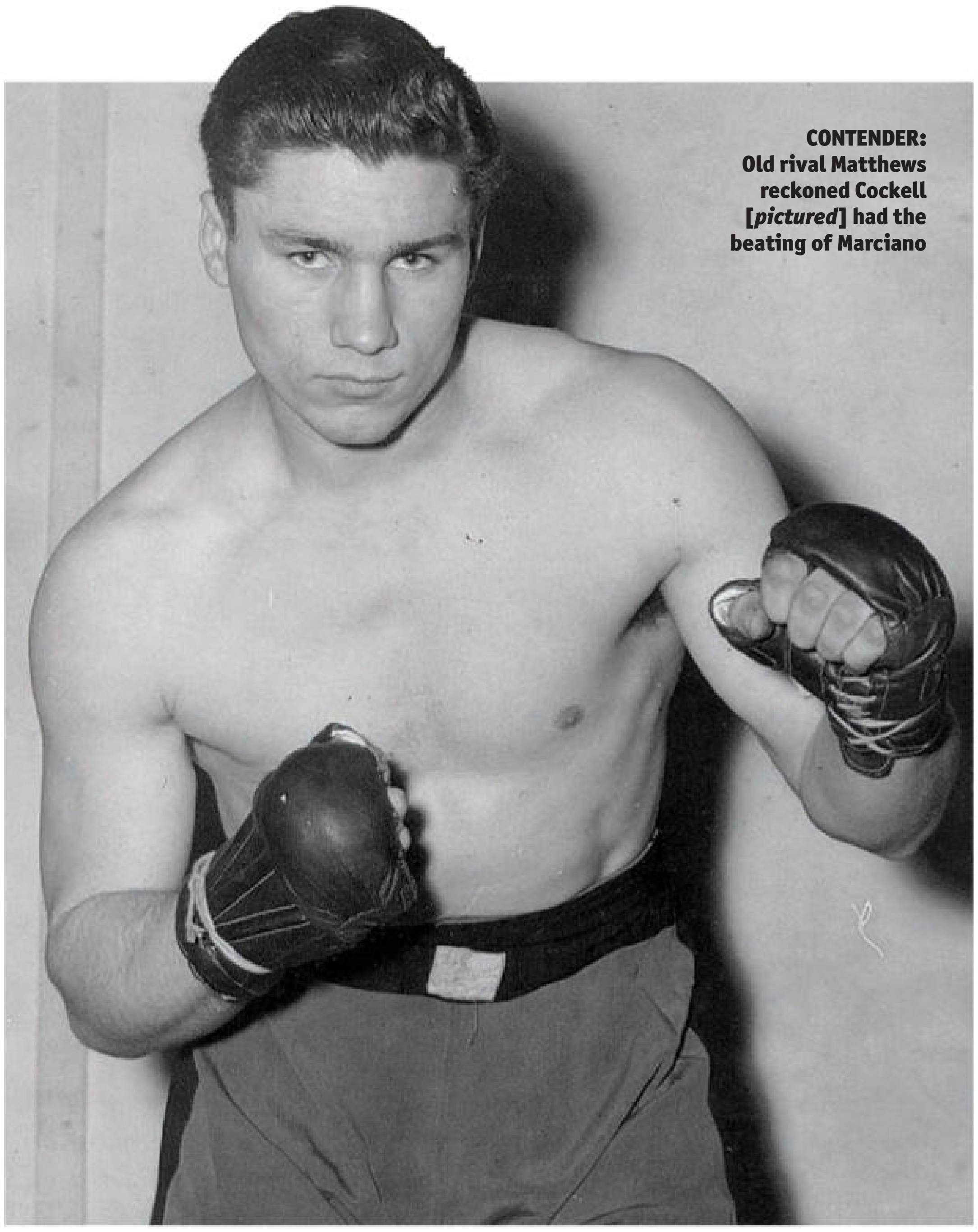
This was a charity event organised by The Berkley Group with Limehouse BA. It is their big annual charity fundraiser.

RESULTS

Ram Singh (Limehouse BA) 67kg beat Andrew Davison 69kg (Golden Gloves) via unan; Amo Singh 62kg (Limehouse BA) beat Will Hewett 62kg (Leigh BC) via split; Reegan Jackson Smith 54kg (Rainham BC) beat Jerry McCarthy (Golden Gloves) via split; Terri Naylor 50kg (Limehouse BA) beat Millie Symonds 50kg (St Ives) via unan; Ramone Morris 57kg (Limehouse BA) beat Mahbub Rahman 59kg (Golden Gloves) via split; Frankie Wood 58kg (Ropes and Glory BC) beat Sidiqi Safiullah 58kg (Golden Gloves) rsc 2; Mason Payne 72kg (Ropes and Glory BC) beat Kyle Woodward 72kg (North Mersey BC), via unan; Joachim Johnson 78kg (Limehouse) beat Badra Toure 78kg (Golden Gloves) via rsc 1.

BOUT OF THE NIGHT: Singh [*right*] edges Hewett

The stadium with biggest ever



CONTENDER: Old rival Matthews reckoned Cockell [*pictured*] had the beating of Marciano

White City Stadium (not Wembley, many years later) was the home of the biggest UK boxing crowd to date – but the Cockell v Matthews rivalry still couldn't fill it

Miles Templeton

Boxing historian

EVERY year between 1948 and 1955, Jack Solomons, then the biggest promoter in British boxing, used to stage one show per year, in the open air, at the White City Stadium in Shepherds Bush, London.

This huge venue was constructed in 1908 for the Olympic Games, and it had been used for boxing sporadically throughout the 1930s. The capacity was around 90,000 and this was exceeded when it was used for the 1939 contest between Len Harvey and Jock McAvoy, still the largest attendance at a British fight (regardless of what Carl Froch or Tyson Fury may tell you). The venue was also used during the 1966 World Cup when Uruguay met France in a group game.

Solomons put on his most spectacular tournaments here and the first one, in 1948, was headed by Freddie Mills and Gus Lesnevich. Between 1949 and 1954 they always took place within the first 10 days of June, with Bruce Woodcock beating Freddie Mills in 1949 and then losing out to Lee Savold in 1950. The following year saw Don Cockell beating the American Nick Barone in the top-liner and then, in 1952, Cockell was beaten by Randolph Turpin in 11 rounds for the British and

SPLITTING OPINION

A bit of healthy debate brings EBA meetings to life

Simon Euan-Smith

simonoldtimers@googlemail.com

EBA correspondent

THERE was a lower turnout than usual at Croydon EBA's February meeting – some members were unwell and some attended London EBA's Annual Awards Lunch (and it was good that we were represented, along with several other Associations).

On the sick list, President Bill Caswell is still in a nursing home, Vice-President Dave McCarthy was taken into hospital the previous night, and Chairman Barry Penny went into hospital the day of the meeting, for knee surgery. I was delighted to get a call from Barry in the evening, saying he was already back home – and of course hopes to make the meeting on March 26. Barry has had a number of problems and it will be great if he could be there. Everyone at the meeting sent best wishes to Barry, Bill and Dave, and I'm sure my readers will too.

The clash with the LEBA event was unfortunate, but unlikely to recur – LEBA's Awards Lunch is normally held on the third Sunday in February, but we agreed to change it this year as the Ringside Charitable Trust had a fundraising lunch scheduled. Then the latter had to be changed – it now happens on Sunday, April 30 at The Azur, Hastings. The whole EBA movement is solidly behind the Trust, and the Ringside Rest and Care Home, and I hope the lunch is a success. Several people have told me that LEBA's was, and I'll publish a report next week.

Topics for discussion at Croydon included the Mauricio Lara-Leigh Wood battle, with some members agreeing with the retirement, others feeling it was premature ("It's the referee's job to stop a fight" was one comment). That got members recalling other stoppages, with some questioning WBC heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis' two-round loss to Oliver McCall at Wembley in 1994 ("Lewis had got his hands up!") and others mentioning bouts they thought had gone on too long. Obviously, the most important attribute a referee can have is knowing when to stop a fight, but it's interesting to have these debates.

The discussion turned to reminiscing about some Croydon boxers of the past, including Frankie Lucas and Chris Blake – both fine amateurs. To many, Lucas was unfairly denied England's middleweight berth at the 1974 Commonwealth Games – he was the reigning ABA champion, and England's choice, Carl Speare, was the man he beat in the final. Happily, Lucas was able to represent his native St Vincent, and came back with gold – having defeated Speare in the semi-final.

attendance

Empire light-heavyweight titles. Turpin returned in 1953 to outpoint Charles Humez in a contest that Solomons optimistically billed as being for the world middleweight title.

The following year, 1954, saw Don Cockell, who had established himself as a heavyweight, return to the stadium to headline against the American Harry Matthews. The contest took place on June 1 and it was billed as an eliminator for the world heavyweight title. Matthews had been around a bit. Managed by veteran Jack Hurley, who had started out with Billy Petrolle in the 1920s before ending his managerial career with Boone Kirkman in the 1970s, Harry had already boxed his way to the top of the pile and had been matched with Rocky Marciano in the Rock's last contest before he won the title. Marciano disposed of Matthews in two vicious rounds in what had been viewed as a pretty even fight before the two men stepped into the ring.

By 1953 he was on the way down, slipping from the number 5 rating in the June 1952 *Ring* magazine ratings to nine the following year. He slipped out of the ratings after he suffered a 10-round points defeat to Cockell in Seattle in August 1953. This victory put Cockell into the ratings himself, for the first time, and he cemented his position by beating Roland La Starza, (no. 4) at the Royal Albert Hall in March 1954. It is easy now to forget just how important (and easy to follow) those *Ring* ratings were.

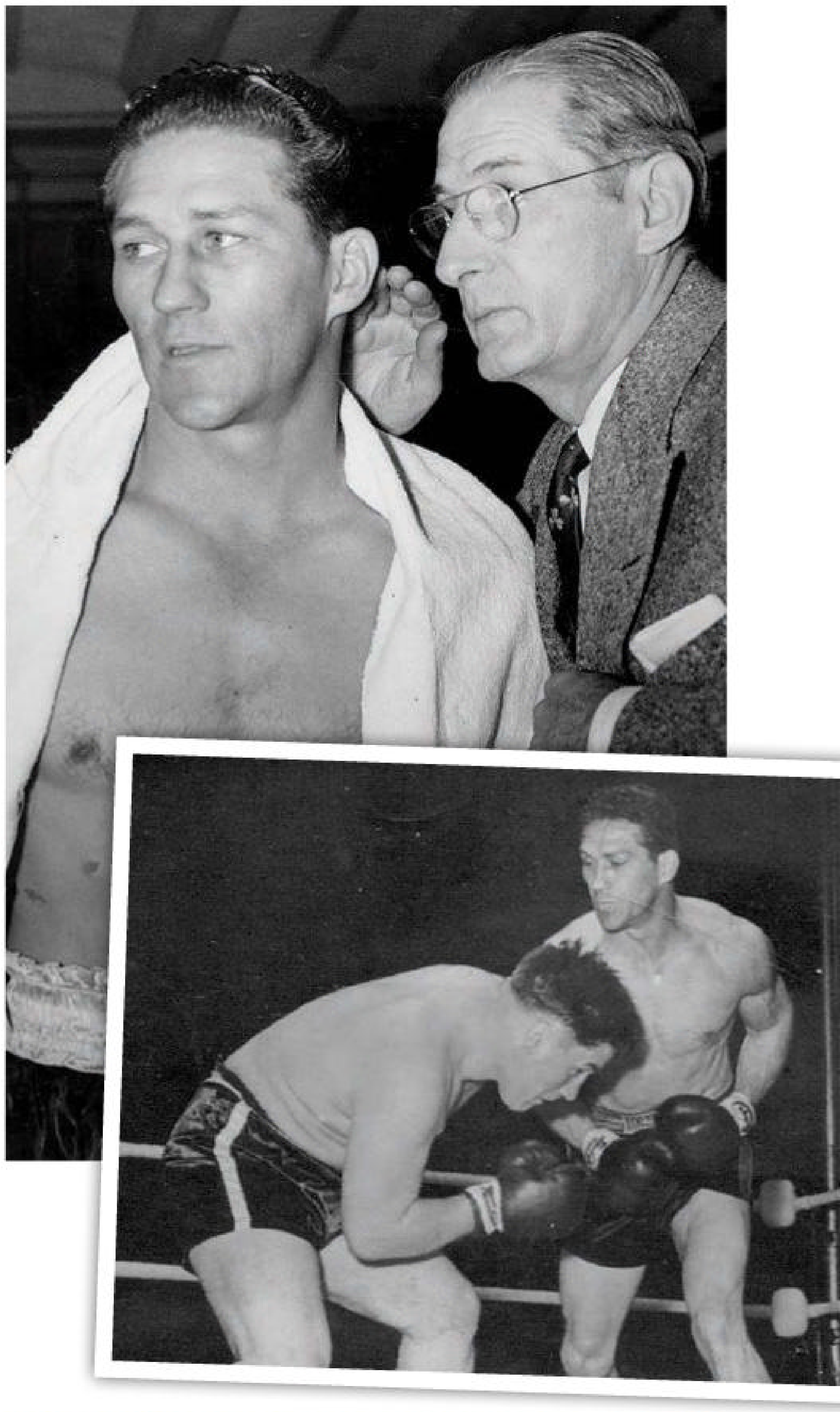
It wasn't the best weather when the two men came together for a second time, and the stadium was far from full. Nevertheless, Cockell pounded his way to victory after 10 rounds of exciting boxing. *Boxing News* reported that "Cockell won this fight because he was always going forward, forcing his rival on the defensive and doing the most damage with his more powerful punching. Matthews finished the fight unmarked, but the same could not be said for the winner, whose left eye was almost closed and who was bleeding from the mouth."

The two men met again the following year, back in Seattle, when Don stopped his man in seven. When asked who was likely to win between Cockell and Marciano, Matthews stated that: "Don is so much superior in style. Marciano's just a strong slugger. Cockell can box and jab and moves with class. A stylist will always beat a slugger."

As we all now know, Marciano beat Cockell in 1955 in one of the dirtiest fights ever seen for the world heavyweight title.

The White City Stadium was only used twice more for boxing, in 1955, and then in 1958, when Brian London brought down the final curtain by beating Joe Erskine for the British and Empire heavyweight titles.

BIG DRAW:
Matthews with manager Jack Hurley and [*below*] battling Cockell



GREAT DEBATE:
Leigh Wood's stoppage loss to Mauricio Lara continues to divide opinion

As a pro, Frankie had some success, including good wins overseas – but could never win a championship, losing in British title bids to Kevin Finnegan and Tony Sibson and in a Southern Area challenge to future British titlist Roy Gumbs (Frankie's last fight).

Blake couldn't win an amateur title, but did become Southern Area welterweight pro champion, pipping Lenny Gloster in a good bout for the vacant belt at Elephant and Castle in March 1987. That was also a British title eliminator, and Blake duly got his chance at champion Lloyd Christie, a few months later – but, like Lucas, was turned back. Both Lucas and Blake are certainly remembered.

After 11 years as Brighton EBA Secretary, Jane Davison has decided to stand down. "I haven't taken this decision lightly," she said. "The last year I have struggled to give it my all as in the past. So, I decided it was time to pass the position on to somebody else. I will also be resigning as Secretary of the British Ex-Boxers Hall Of Fame."

"I will not be disappearing. I will be at The Leeds Hall Of Fame [September 24] and I will continue to support the EBAs by visiting when possible."

Jane has been an absolute stalwart, both for Brighton and the Hall of Fame. I've certainly appreciated her supplying news and newsletters over the years. I hope someone will come forward and take on her role.

JOSHUA GUSTAVE

A man who was drawn to the sport by Mike Tyson meets **Andrew Fairley**

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When and why you started boxing:
I started around 15/16. I was drawn to the gym from the times I would pick up my older brother and see the steamed windows and hear the noises of the gym, which seemed appealing to me. I also thought I was a decent fighter at that age but came to learn that there was more to boxing than just fighting.

Favourite all-time fighter:
Mike Tyson. Everything about a prime Tyson drew me to the sport, from the way he was so devastating in the ring to the way he carried himself outside the ring. He was unapologetically himself at all times.

Best fight you've seen:
It would have been Tony Bellew vs Illunga Makubu. After the fight I naturally looked more into Bellew's career and his journey has been an inspirational one for me.

Personal career highlight:
Turning pro and persevering through all the trials and tribulations on the way to my first fight; just not giving up on myself or my dreams is my biggest achievement, as I've had plenty of opportunities to go down a different path. But I've stayed true to myself and kept pushing.

Toughest opponent:
All my opponents have been good competitors and I give credit to anyone who decides to put on gloves and step inside a boxing ring.

Best and worst attributes as a boxer:
My strength is definitely my mindset. I am a strong believer in thoughts become things and that your mindset determines your quality of life. My weakness would be my sweet tooth.

Training tip:
Embrace the process, dig deep and push yourself every session. One per cent better every day and remember uncomfortable situations are the key to growth.

Favourite meal/restaurant:
Cereal – I can eat that any time of day. Restaurant would be anywhere that does a good burger and chips

Best friends in boxing:
I don't have best friends in boxing.

Which other athlete would you like to be and why?
An MMA fighter.

Last film/TV show you saw:
Game Of Thrones, watching it for the second time. Undefeated series

Who would play you in a film of your life:
Tom Hardy

Have you ever been starstruck:
I don't get starstruck but the first time I see all four directing staff on *SAS: Who Dares Wins*, I was like "Wow, this is real and this is really happening". Those four men are real life superheroes.

Last time you cried:
In the gym talking to my coach about life.

Best advice received:
Never make permanent decisions on temporary feelings.

Worst rumour about yourself:
None.

Something not many people know about you:
My second daughter was born on my 20th birthday.

FAST FACTS

Age: 24 **Nationality:** English **Height:** 5ft 11ins **From:** Ilford
Stance: Orthodox **Record:** 3-0 **Division:** Super-welterweight
Next fight: Gustave will be hoping to go to 4-0 this weekend when he takes on Robbie Chapman on Saturday night (March 11) inside York Hall.

[**NEXT ISSUE ON SALE** MARCH 15, 2023 (DIGITAL) AND MARCH 16, 2023 (PRINT)]

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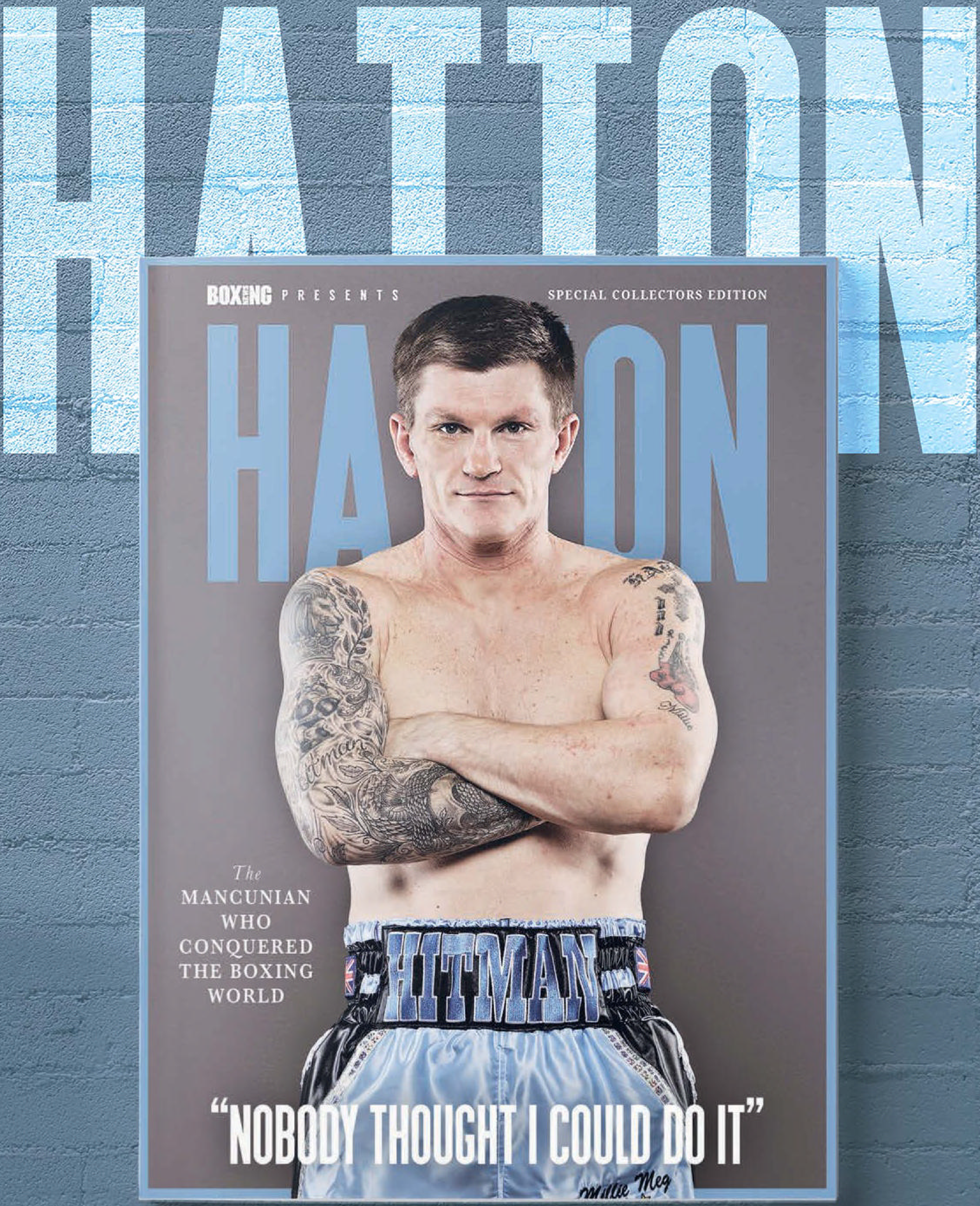
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